

A L I E N STM

VS.

PREDATORTM

OMNIBUS

VOLUME 1



A L I E N S TM

VS.

PREDATOR TM

OMNIBUS



ALIENSTM
vs.
PREDATORTM
OMNIBUS
VOLUME 1



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ALIENS VS. PREDATOR



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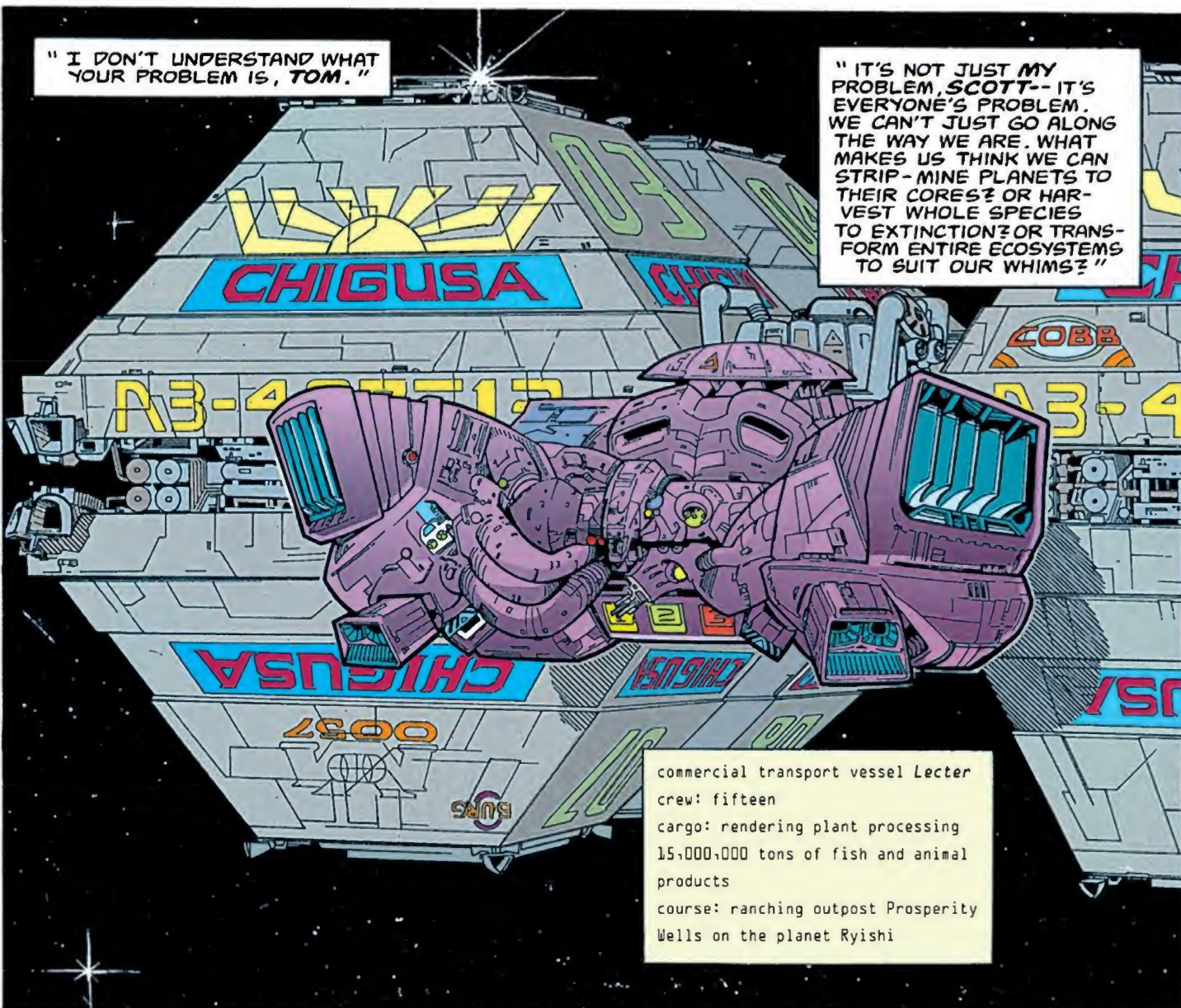


SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE...



"I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR PROBLEM IS, TOM."

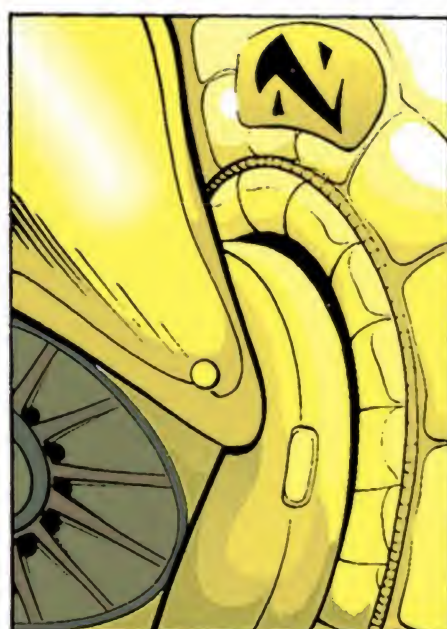
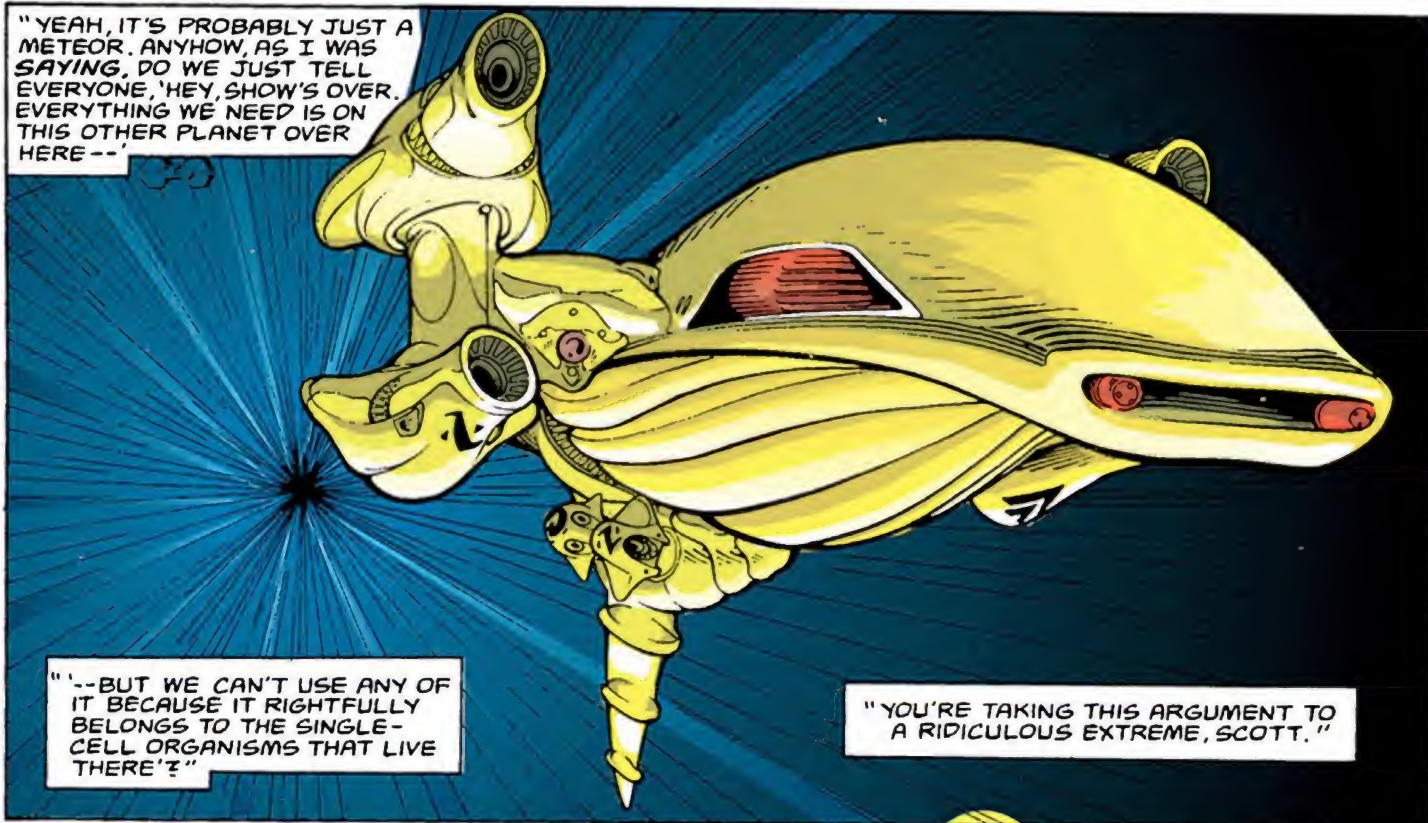
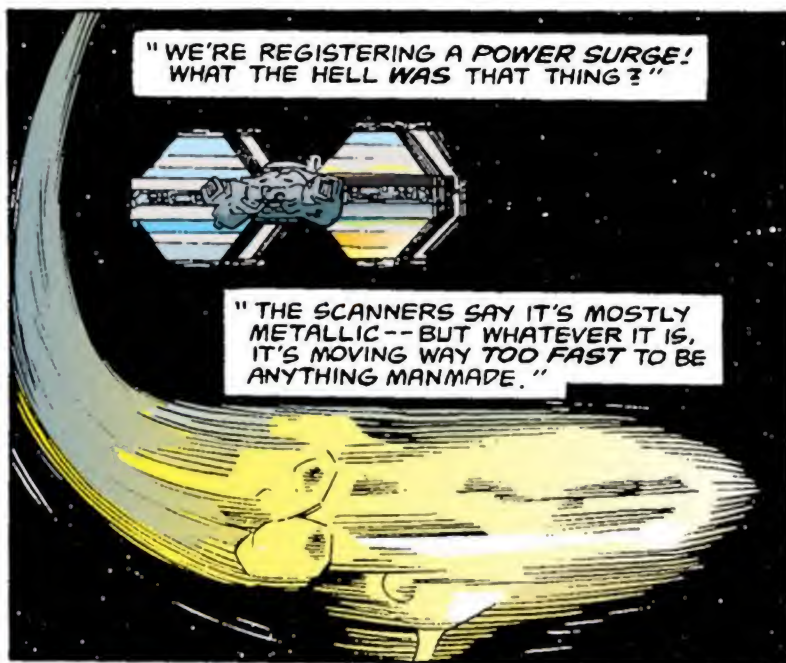
"IT'S NOT JUST MY PROBLEM, SCOTT-- IT'S EVERYONE'S PROBLEM. WE CAN'T JUST GO ALONG THE WAY WE ARE. WHAT MAKES US THINK WE CAN STRIP-MINE PLANETS TO THEIR CORES? OR HARVEST WHOLE SPECIES TO EXTINCTION? OR TRANSFORM ENTIRE ECOSYSTEMS TO SUIT OUR WHIMS?"

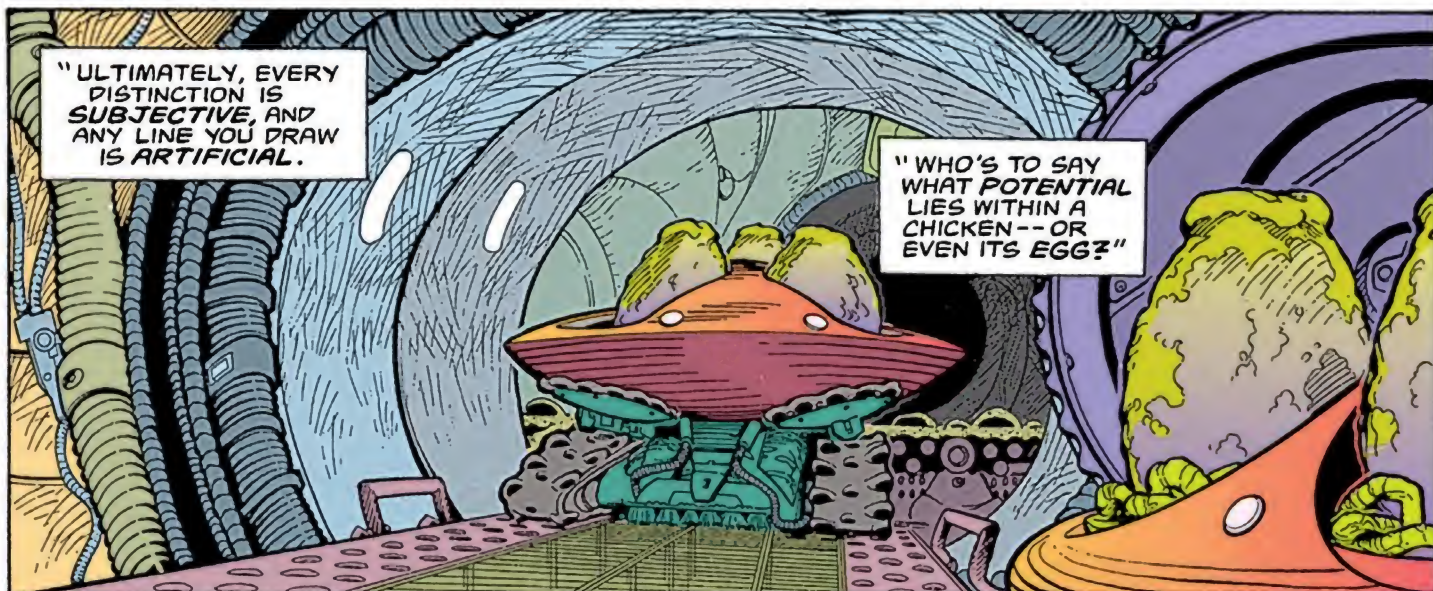


commercial transport vessel *Lecter*
crew: fifteen
cargo: rendering plant processing
15,000,000 tons of fish and animal
products
course: ranching outpost *Prosperity*
Wells on the planet *Ryishi*



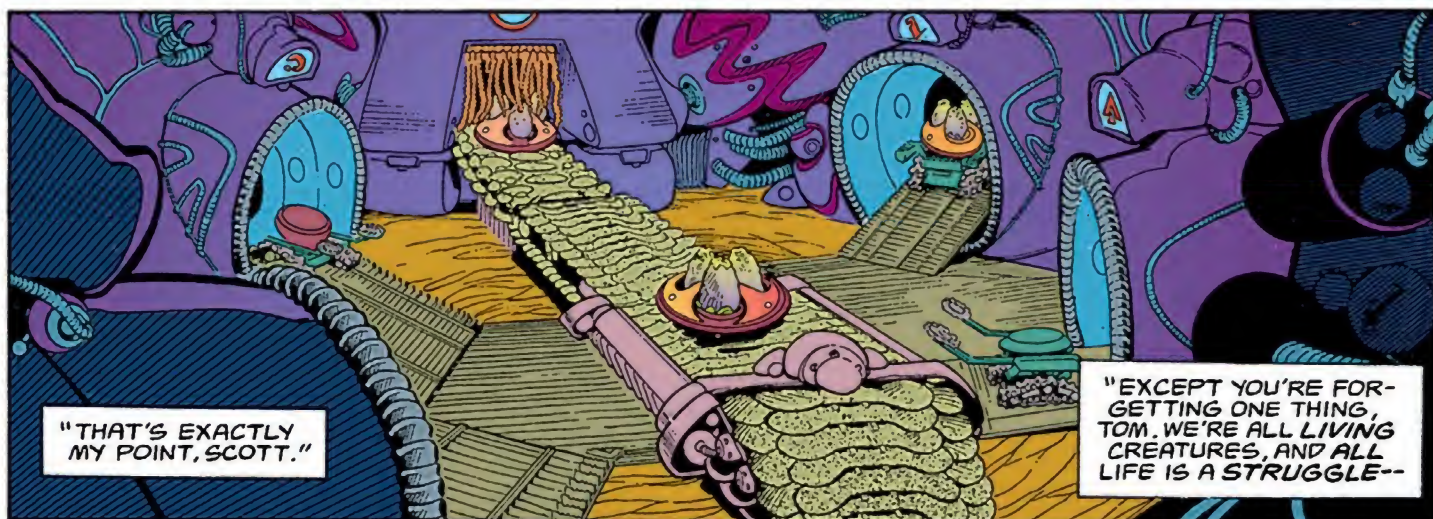
BE REALISTIC, TOM-- EVERYONE KNEW EARTH'S RESOURCES WOULDN'T LAST FOREVER. WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO, IGNORE THE OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO US BECAUSE A MILLION YEARS FROM NOW THEY *MIGHT* BE OF SOME USE TO AN EMERGING LIFE FORM?





"ULTIMATELY, EVERY DISTINCTION IS **SUBJECTIVE**, AND ANY LINE YOU DRAW IS **ARTIFICIAL**."

"WHO'S TO SAY WHAT **POTENTIAL** LIES WITHIN A CHICKEN-- OR EVEN ITS **EGG**?"

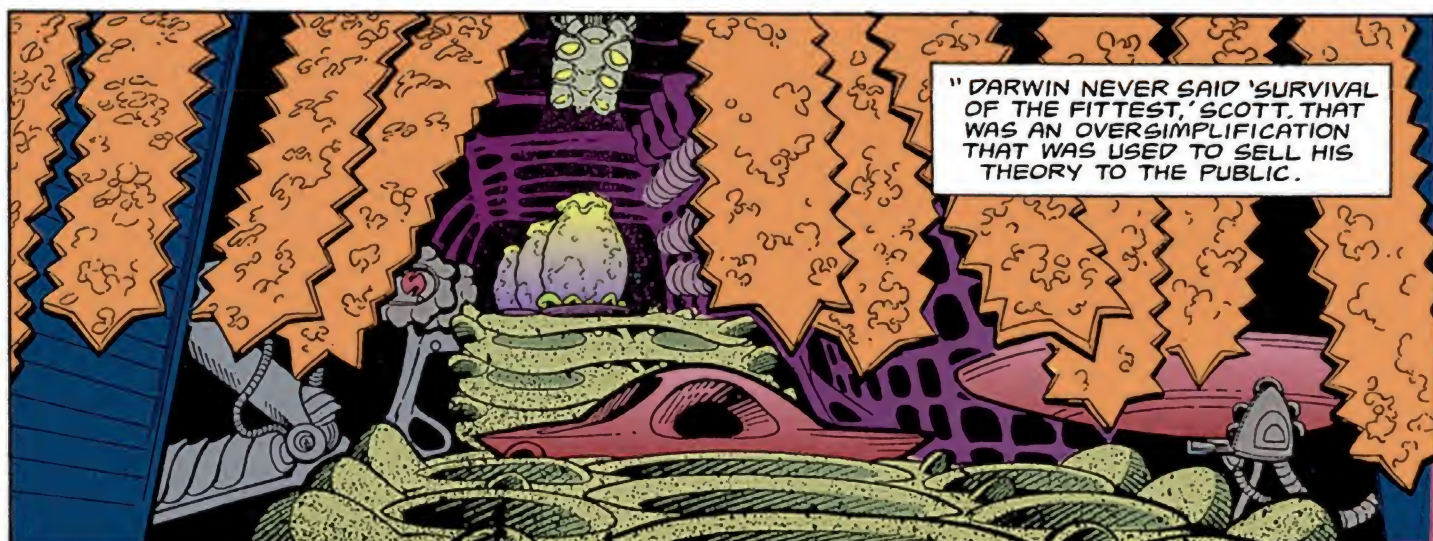


"THAT'S EXACTLY MY POINT, SCOTT."

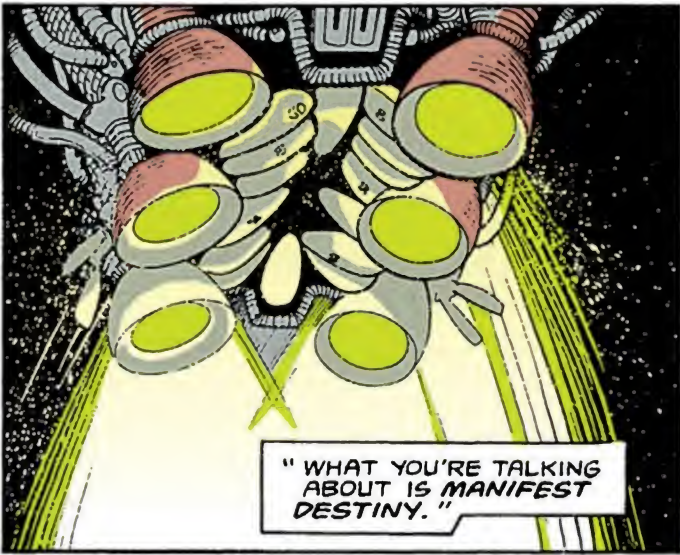
"EXCEPT YOU'RE FORGETTING ONE THING, TOM. WE'RE ALL **LIVING CREATURES**, AND ALL LIFE IS A **STRUGGLE**--"



"-- NO MATTER WHERE YOU OR ANYONE ELSE MAY *WISH* TO DRAW THE LINE, IT STILL ENDS UP AS DARWIN'S '**SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST**.'"



"DARWIN NEVER SAID '**SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST**,' SCOTT. THAT WAS AN **OVERSIMPLIFICATION** THAT WAS USED TO SELL HIS THEORY TO THE PUBLIC."



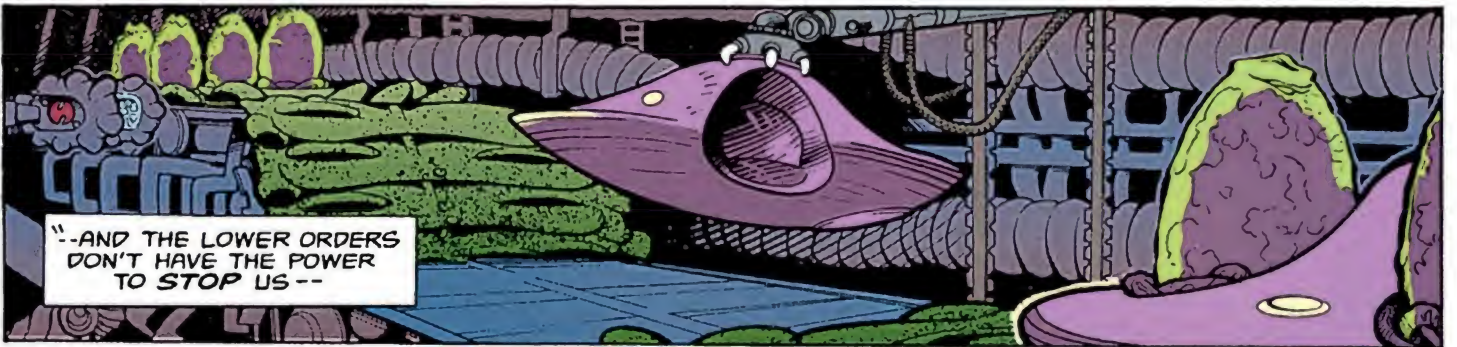
"WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT IS **MANIFEST DESTINY**."



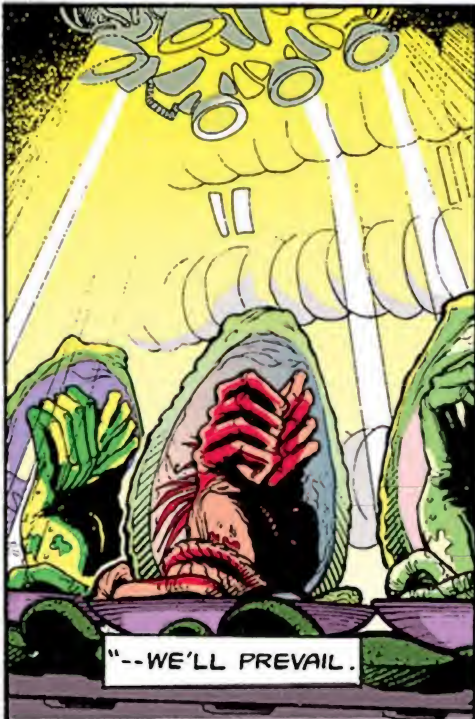
"YOU CAN CALL IT WHATEVER YOU WANT, TOM."



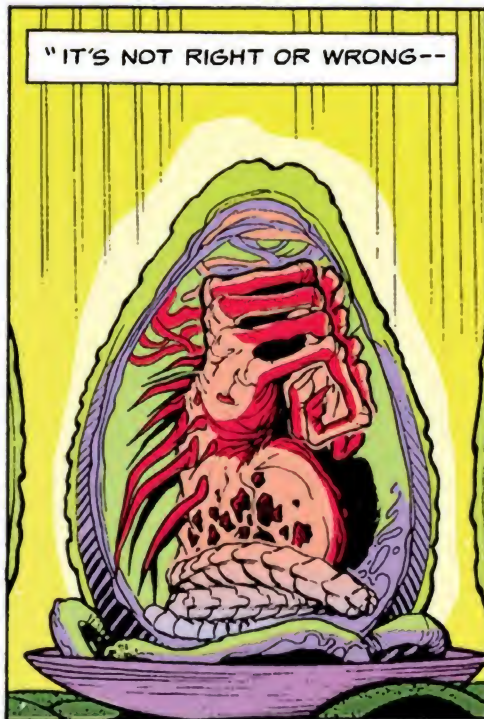
"THE FACT REMAINS THAT IF THE HUMAN RACE **NEEDS TO DO SOMETHING TO SURVIVE**--"



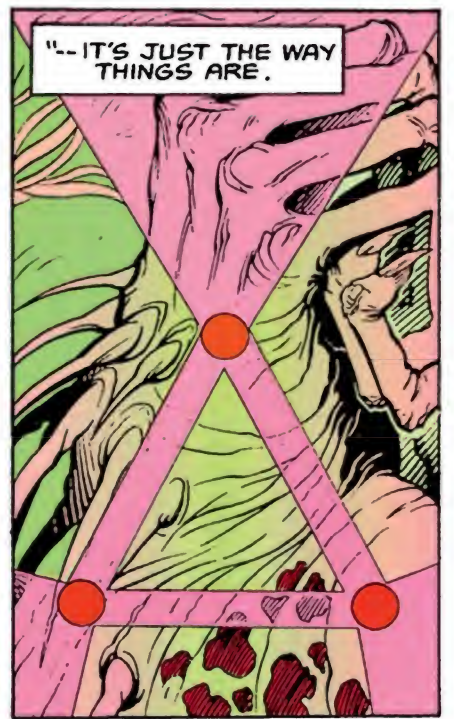
"--AND THE LOWER ORDERS DON'T HAVE THE POWER TO **STOP US**--"



"--WE'LL PREVAIL."



"IT'S NOT RIGHT OR WRONG--"

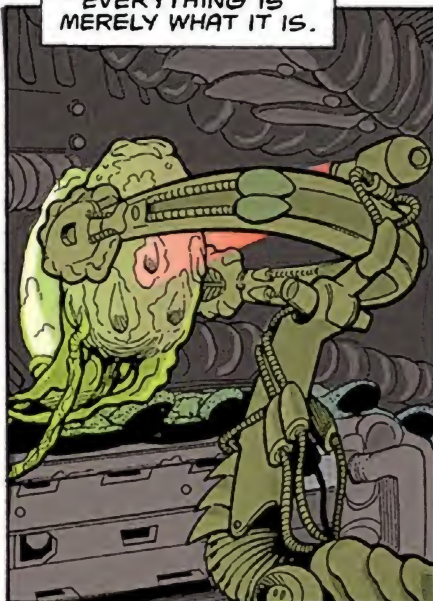


"--IT'S JUST THE WAY THINGS ARE."

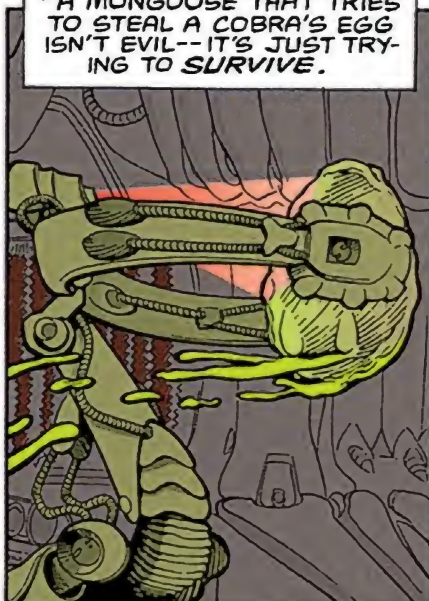
"YOU'VE GOT TO STOP PROJECTING *HUMAN* MOTIVES AND EMOTIONS ONTO OTHER ORGANISMS.



"EVERYTHING IS MERELY WHAT IT IS.



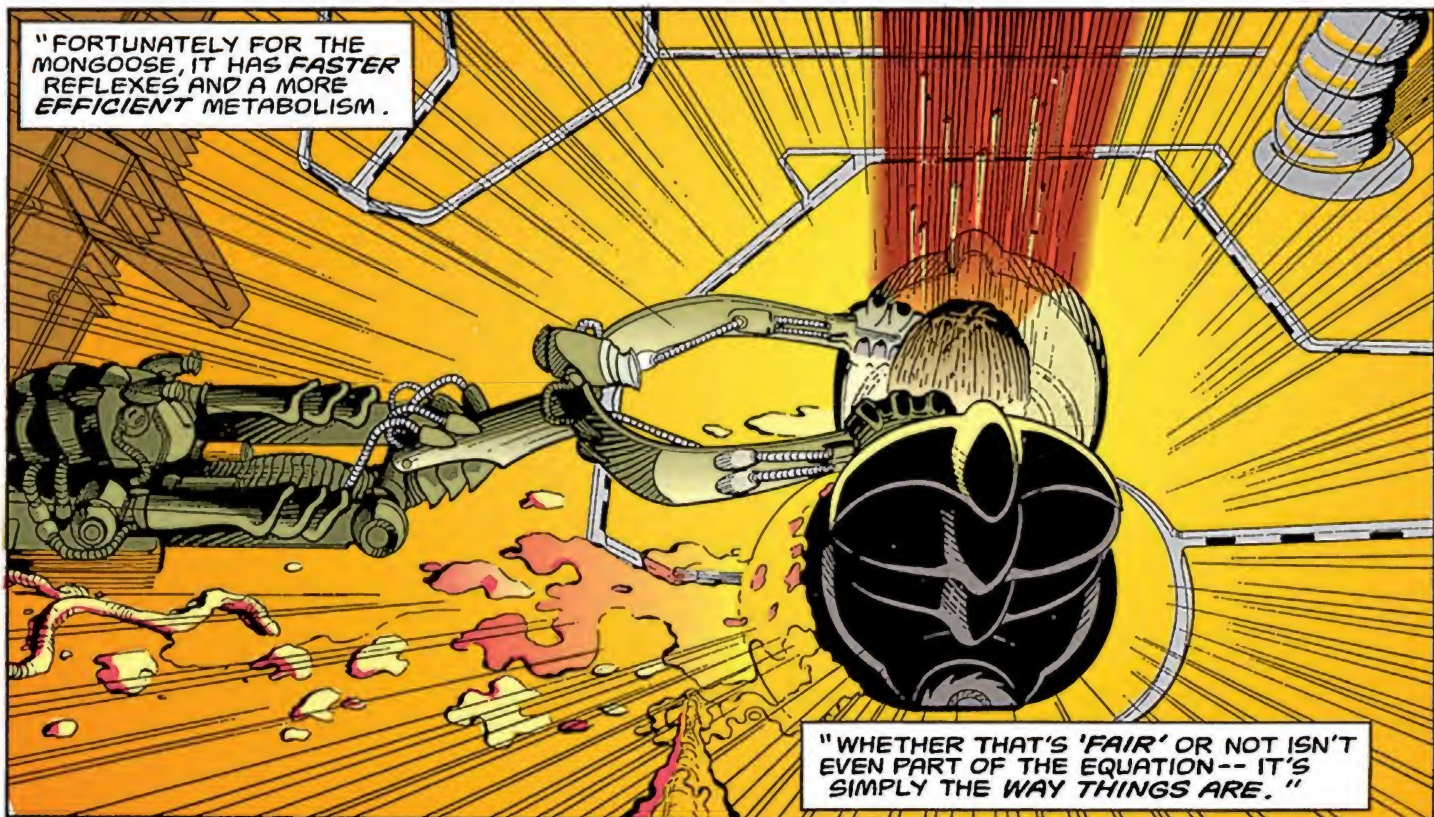
"A MONGOOSE THAT TRIES TO STEAL A COBRA'S EGG ISN'T EVIL-- IT'S JUST TRYING TO *SURVIVE*.



"BUT THE COBRA IS TRYING TO SURVIVE, TOO. AND IF IT CATCHES THE MONGOOSE IN ITS NEST, THERE'S GOING TO BE A FIGHT.



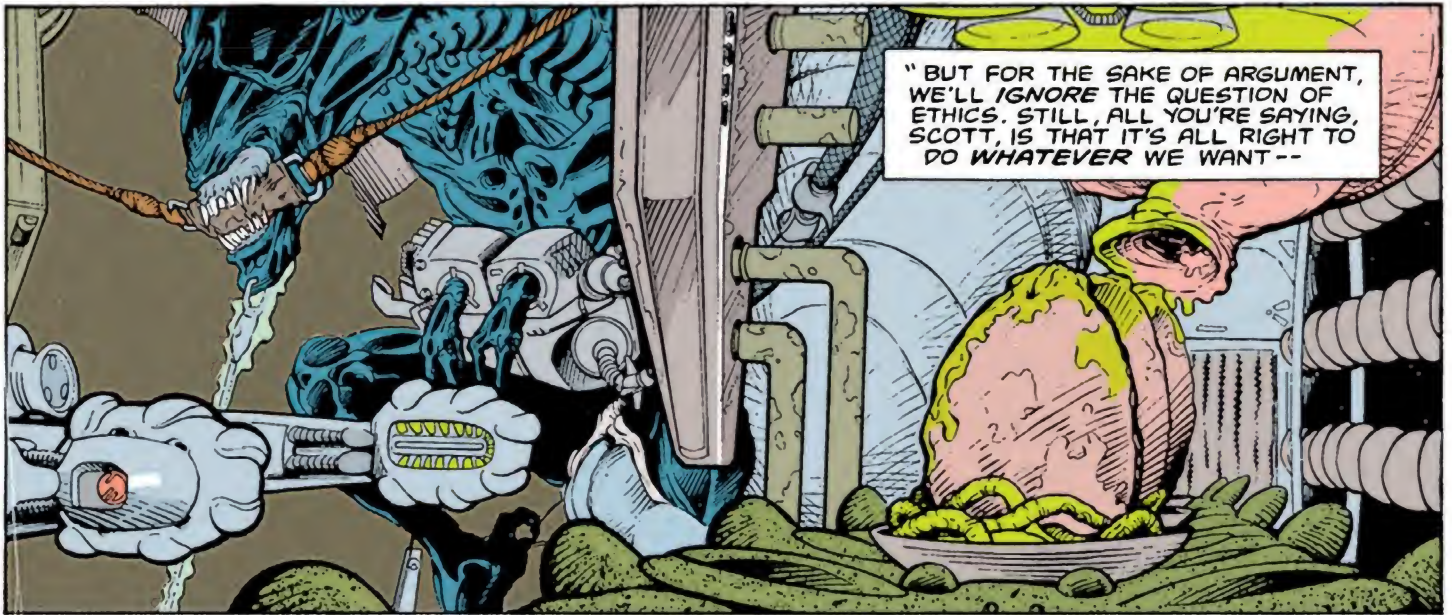
"FORTUNATELY FOR THE MONGOOSE, IT HAS *FASTER* REFLEXES AND A MORE *EFFICIENT* METABOLISM.



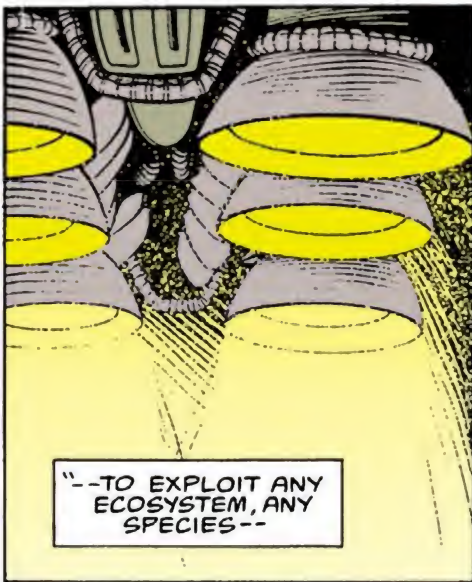
"WHETHER THAT'S '*FAIR*' OR NOT ISN'T EVEN PART OF THE EQUATION-- IT'S SIMPLY THE *WAY THINGS ARE*."



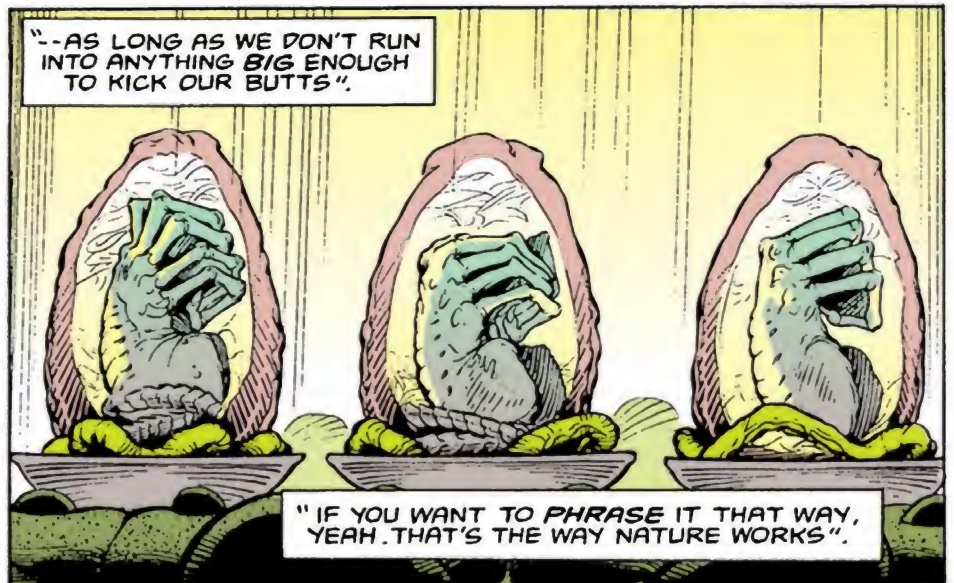
"YEAH? TRY TELLING THAT TO THE COBRA."



"BUT FOR THE SAKE OF ARGUMENT, WE'LL IGNORE THE QUESTION OF ETHICS. STILL, ALL YOU'RE SAYING, SCOTT, IS THAT IT'S ALL RIGHT TO DO WHATEVER WE WANT--

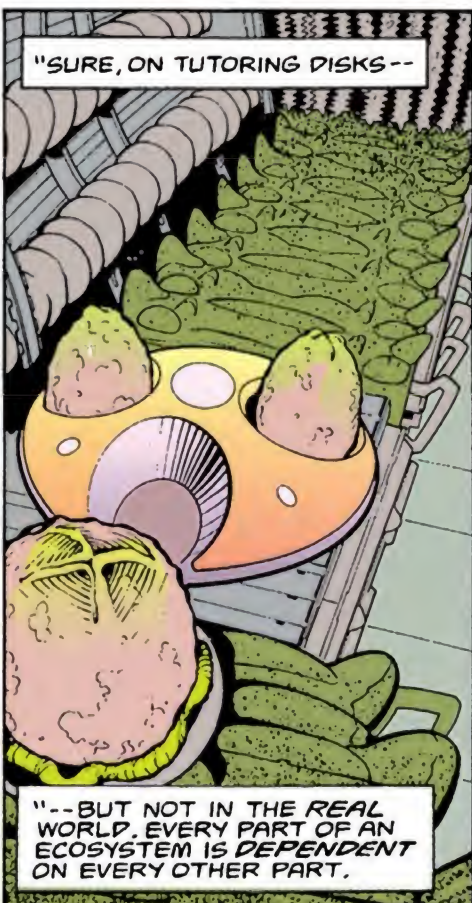


"--TO EXPLOIT ANY ECOSYSTEM, ANY SPECIES--



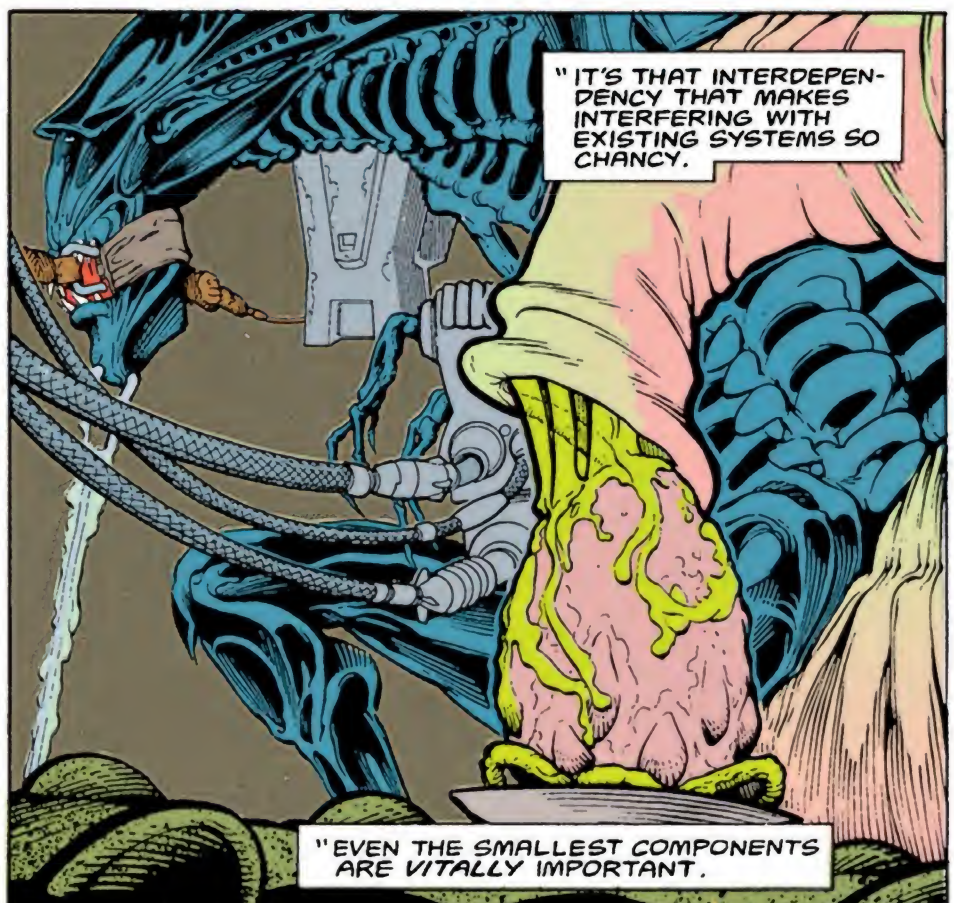
"--AS LONG AS WE DON'T RUN INTO ANYTHING BIG ENOUGH TO KICK OUR BUTTS".

"IF YOU WANT TO PHRASE IT THAT WAY, YEAH. THAT'S THE WAY NATURE WORKS".



"SURE, ON TUTORING DISKS--

"--BUT NOT IN THE REAL WORLD. EVERY PART OF AN ECOSYSTEM IS DEPENDENT ON EVERY OTHER PART.



"IT'S THAT INTERDEPENDENCY THAT MAKES INTERFERING WITH EXISTING SYSTEMS SO CHANCY.

"EVEN THE SMALLEST COMPONENTS ARE VITALLY IMPORTANT.

"WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED THAT MILLIONS OF 'KILLER BEES' COULD SPRING FROM A HANDFUL OF ESCAPED AFRICAN BEES?"



"OR THAT A FEW BRAZILIAN FIRE ANTS COULD MAKE THE SOUTHEASTERN PORTION OF THE U.S. VIRTUALLY UNINHABITABLE IN JUST OVER SEVENTY YEARS?"

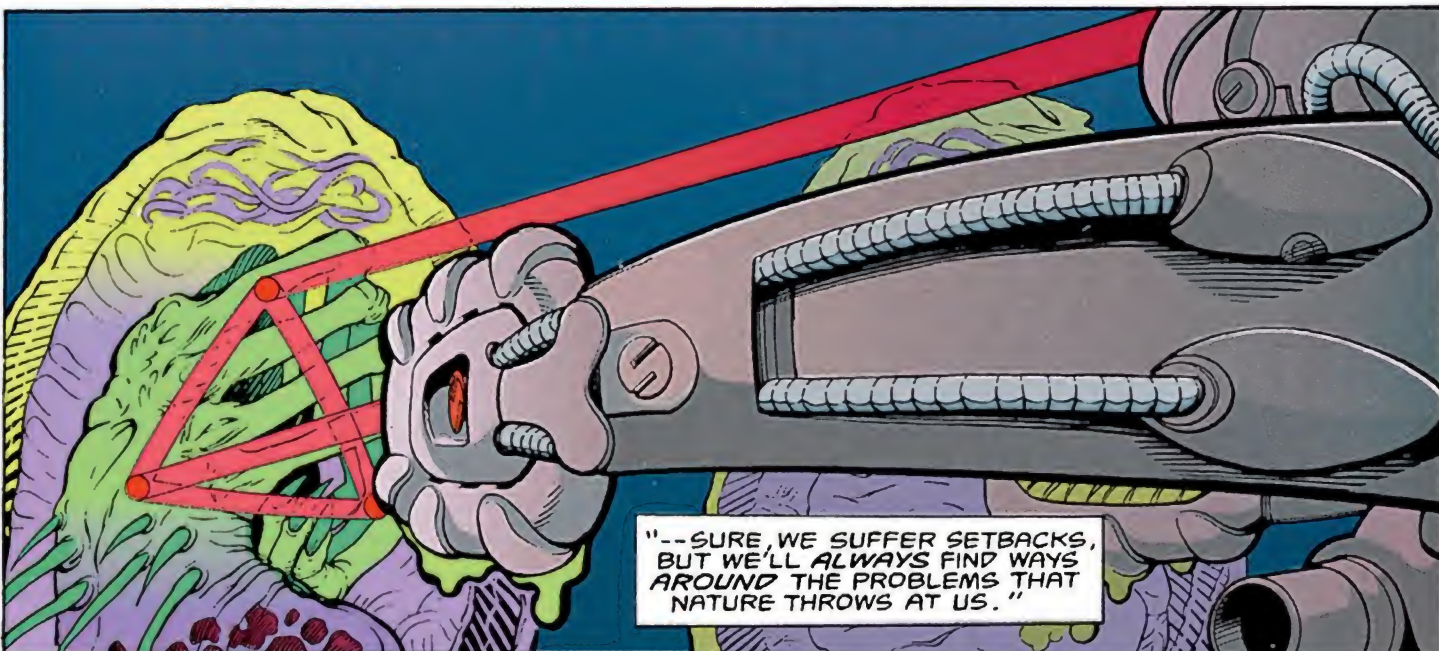
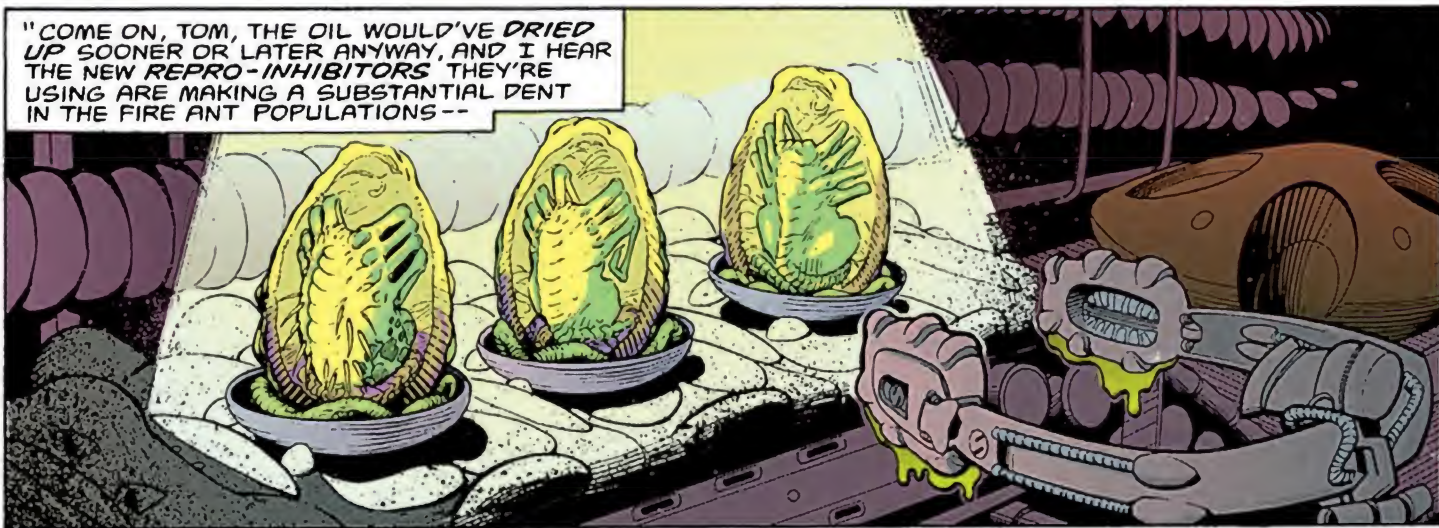


"AND WHAT ABOUT THE 'OIL-EATING' BACTERIUM THE GENESPLICERS AT THE PETROLEUM COMPANIES DEVELOPED TO CLEAN UP THEIR SPILLS?"

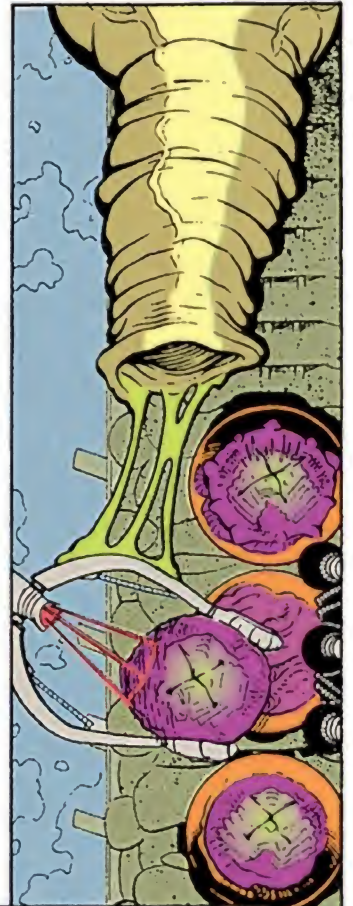
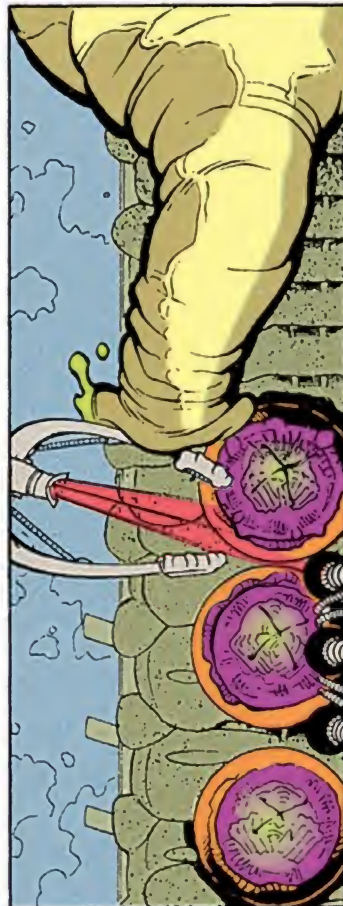
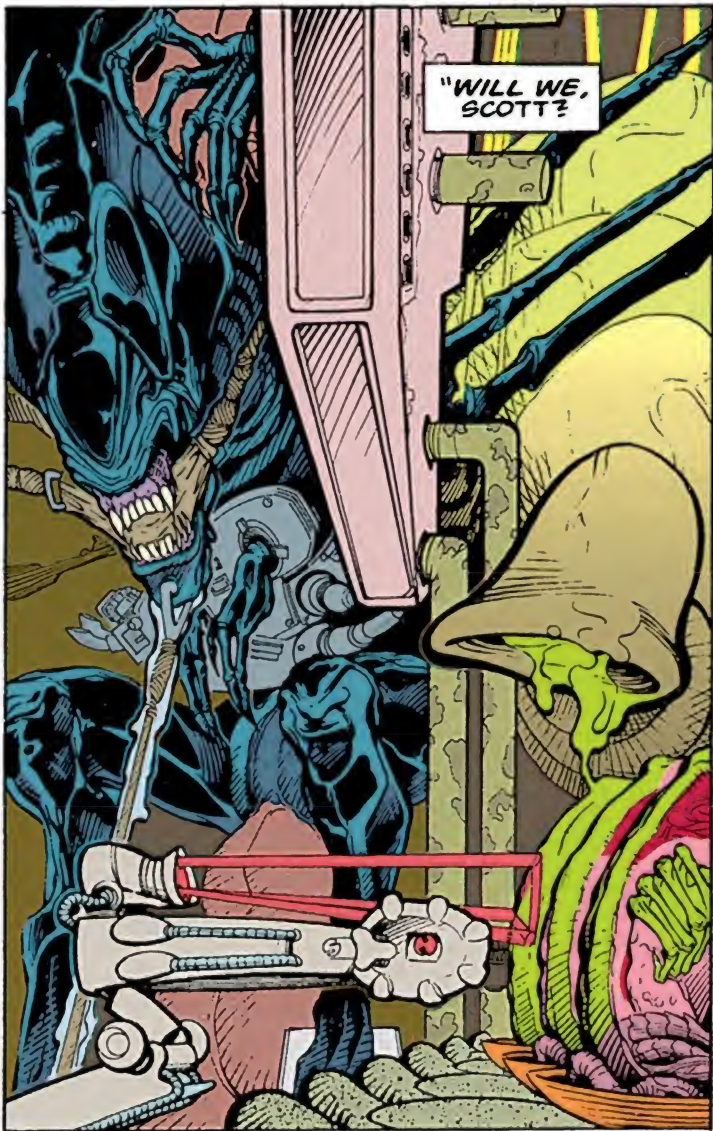


"REMEMBER HOW THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD IT COMPLETELY IN THEIR CONTROL?"

"COME ON, TOM, THE OIL WOULD'VE DRIED UP SOONER OR LATER ANYWAY, AND I HEAR THE NEW REPRO-INHIBITORS THEY'RE USING ARE MAKING A SUBSTANTIAL DENT IN THE FIRE ANT POPULATIONS --"

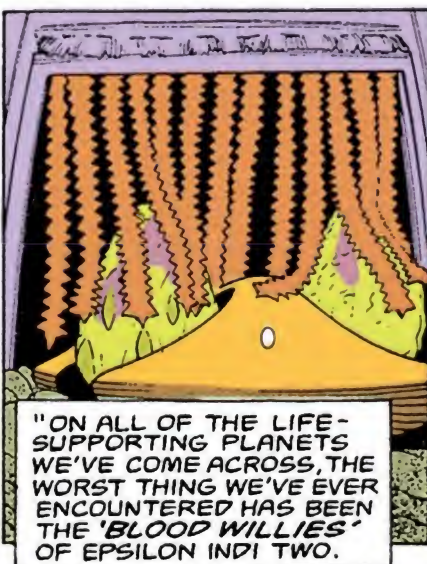
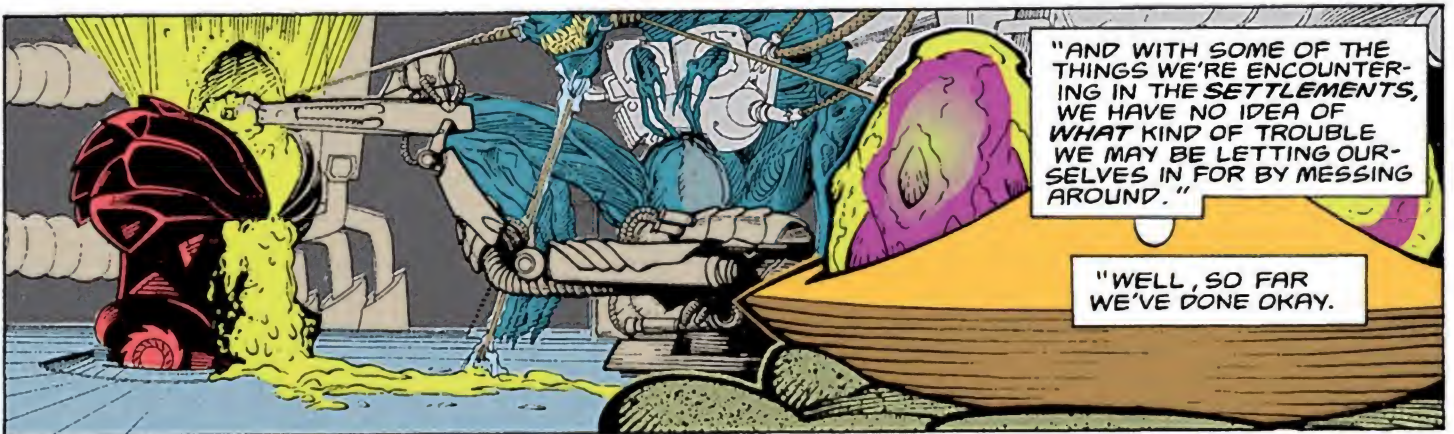


"-- SURE, WE SUFFER SETBACKS, BUT WE'LL ALWAYS FIND WAYS AROUND THE PROBLEMS THAT NATURE THROWS AT US."

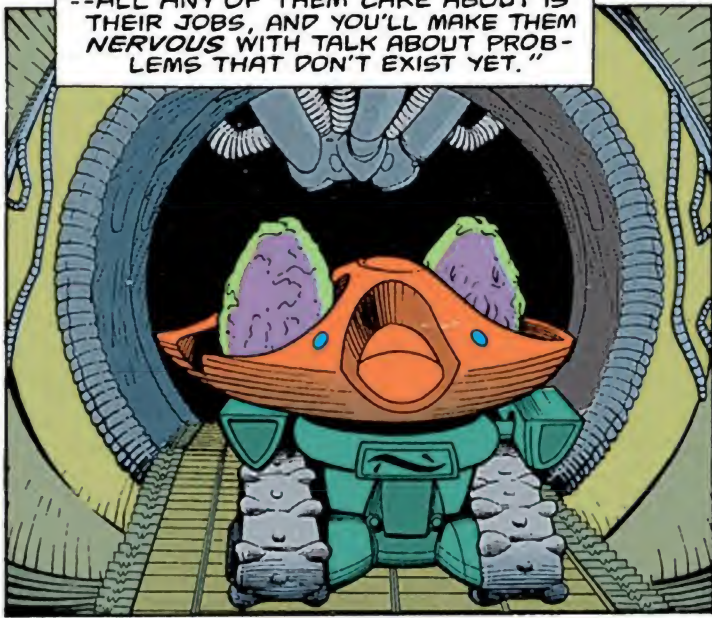


"I'M NOT SO SURE, MANKIND NEVER SEEMS TO LEARN. WE GET OUR HANDS SLAPPED ON A REGULAR BASIS, BUT WE STILL CAN'T SEEM TO KEEP THEM TO OURSELVES."

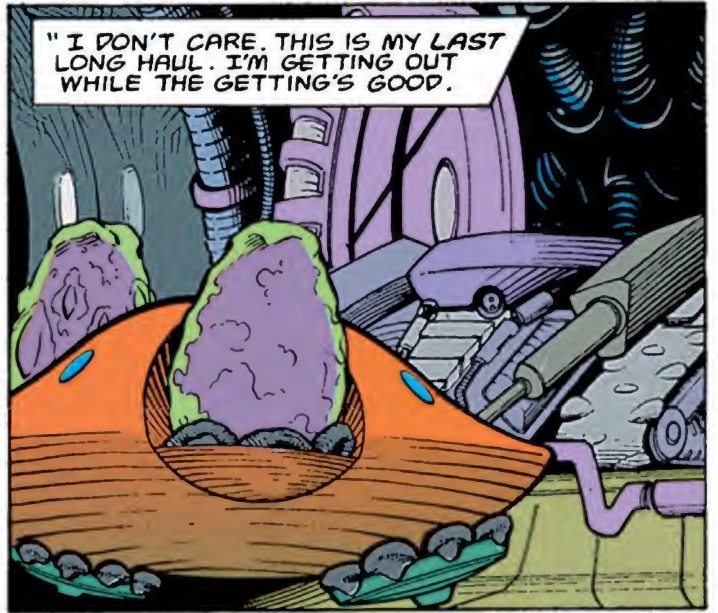
"THE TIGHTER THE GRIP WE TRY TO GET ON NATURE, THE MORE NATURE PUSHES THROUGH THE CRACKS IN OUR TECHNOLOGY."



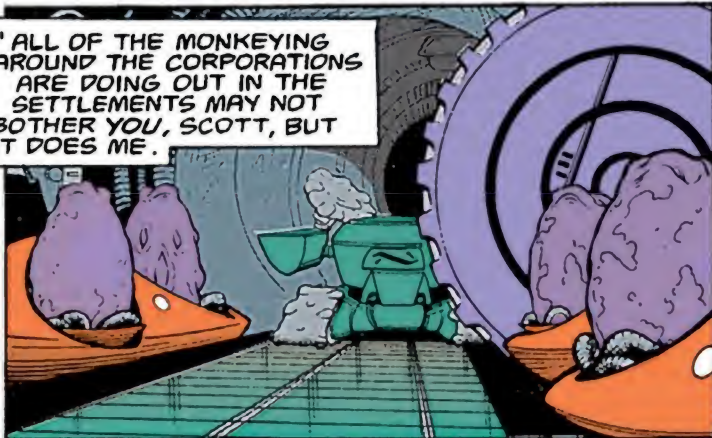
"--ALL ANY OF THEM CARE ABOUT IS THEIR JOBS, AND YOU'LL MAKE THEM NERVOUS WITH TALK ABOUT PROBLEMS THAT DON'T EXIST YET."



"I DON'T CARE. THIS IS MY LAST LONG HAUL. I'M GETTING OUT WHILE THE GETTING'S GOOD."

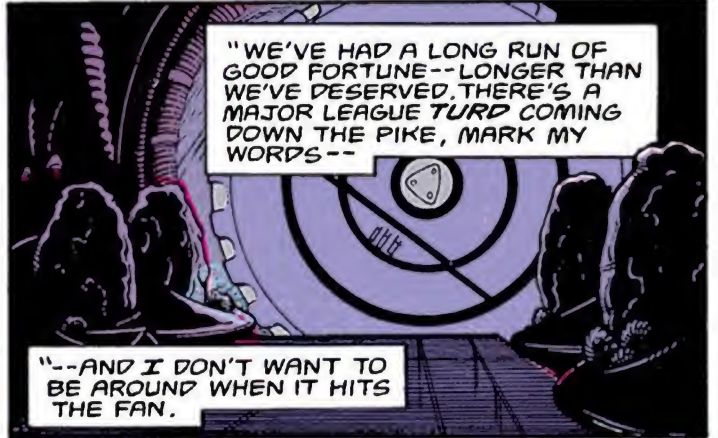


"ALL OF THE MONKEYING AROUND THE CORPORATIONS ARE DOING OUT IN THE SETTLEMENTS MAY NOT BOTHER YOU, SCOTT, BUT IT DOES ME."

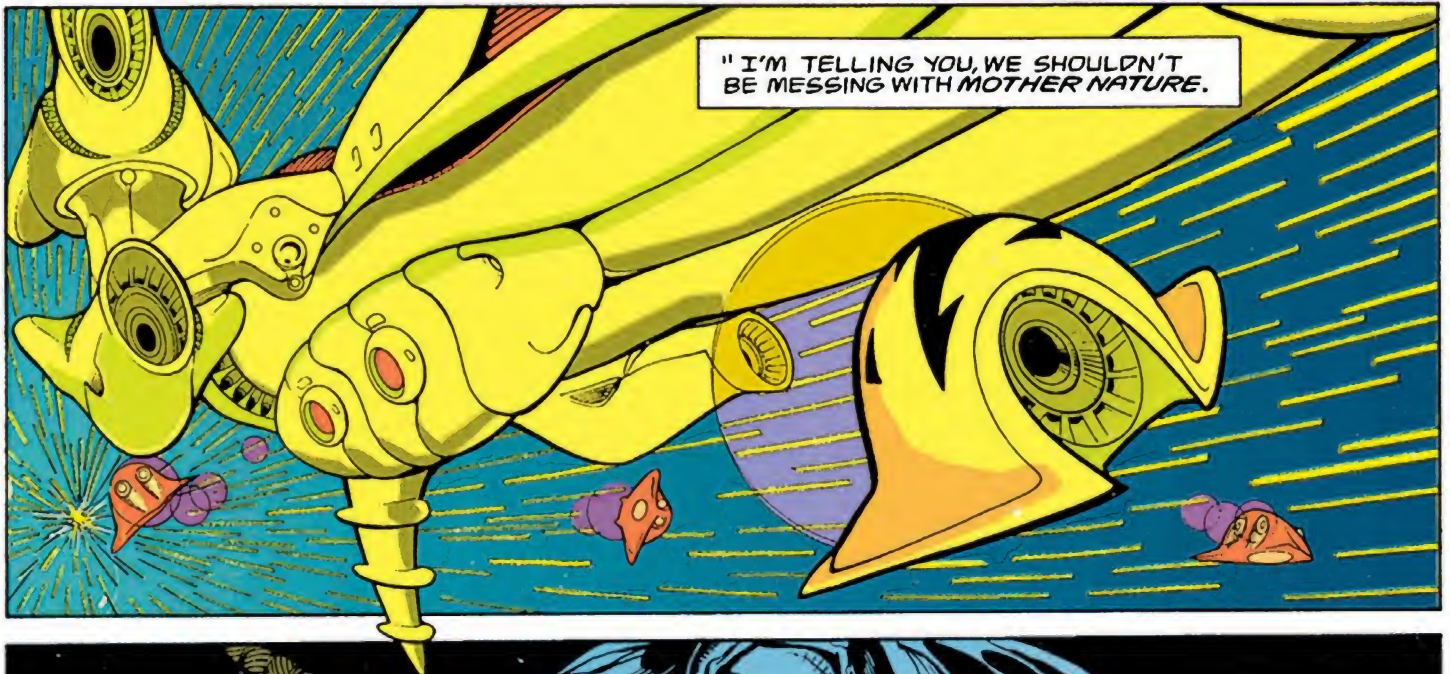


"WE'VE HAD A LONG RUN OF GOOD FORTUNE--LONGER THAN WE'VE DESERVED. THERE'S A MAJOR LEAGUE TURD COMING DOWN THE PIKE, MARK MY WORDS--"

"--AND I DON'T WANT TO BE AROUND WHEN IT HITS THE FAN."



"I'M TELLING YOU, WE SHOULDN'T BE MESSING WITH MOTHER NATURE."



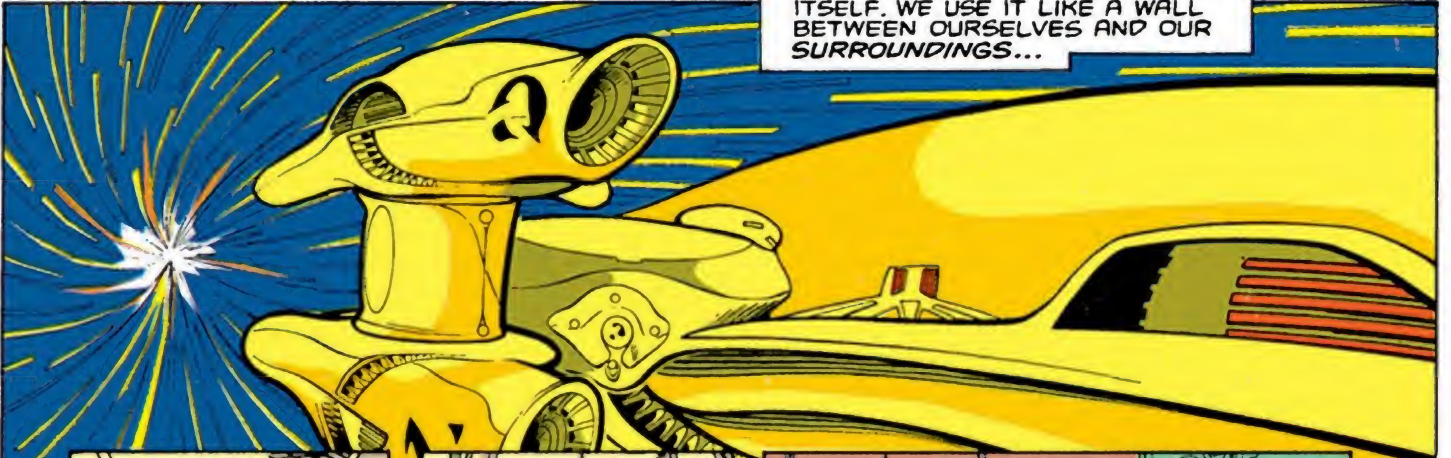
"SHE'S A REAL BITCH."



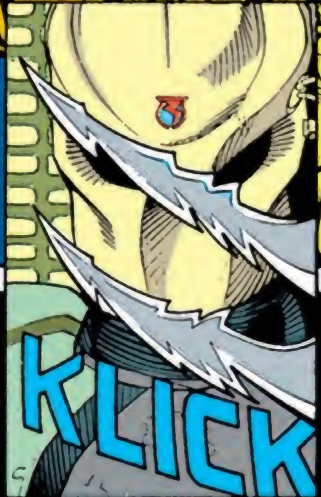
"WE HAVE TO LEARN TO WORK WITH NATURE. THIS RELIANCE ON TECHNOLOGY IS GETTING TO BE TOO MUCH FOR ME, SCOTT."



"IT'S NO LONGER A MEANS TO AN END-- IT'S BECOME AN END UNTO ITSELF. WE USE IT LIKE A WALL BETWEEN OURSELVES AND OUR SURROUNDINGS..."



"BETWEEN OURSELVES--"



KLICK



"--AND WHO WE REALLY ARE."



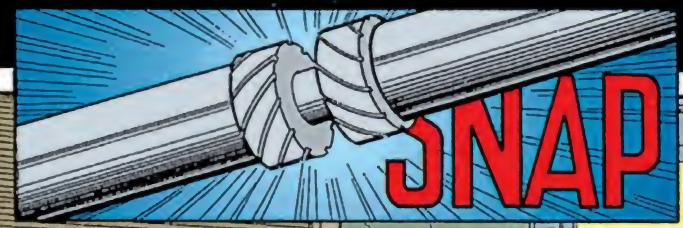
"WE'VE COME A LONG WAY IN THE PAST THREE THOUSAND YEARS--"

"--BUT I CAN'T HELP FEELING THAT WE'VE LOST AS MUCH AS WE'VE GAINED."



"SO WHAT'S YOUR SOLUTION, TOM? GIVE UP MODERN CONVENIENCES AND GO BACK TO STONE KNIVES AND SQUATTING IN CAVES?"

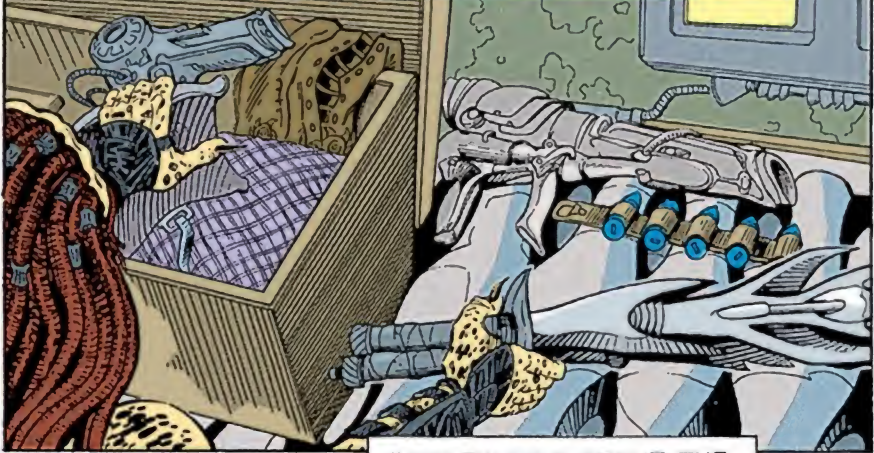
"YOU'RE REACHING FOR EXTREMES AGAIN, SCOTT, BUT--"



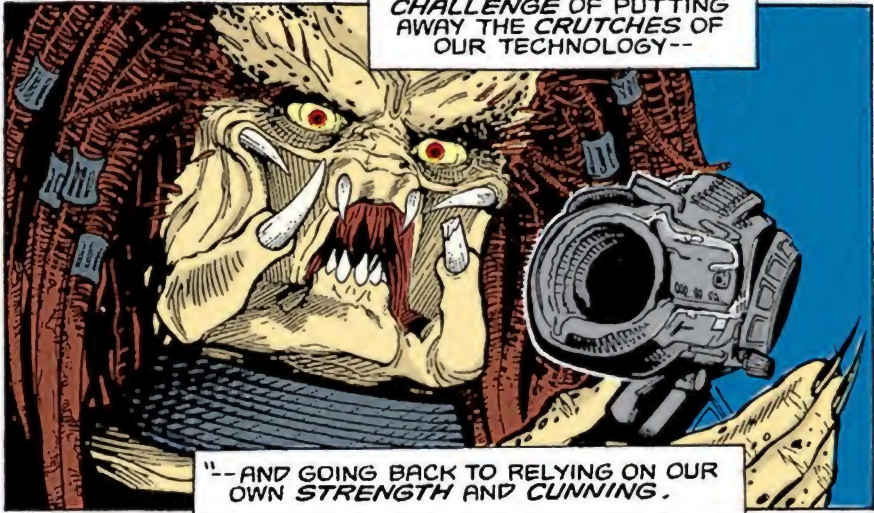
"-- THAT JUST MIGHT BE WHAT IT TAKES TO PUT US BACK ON THE RIGHT TRACK."



"AND I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT AUSTERITY OR DEPRIVATION."



"I'M TALKING ABOUT THE CHALLENGE OF PUTTING AWAY THE CRUTCHES OF OUR TECHNOLOGY--"

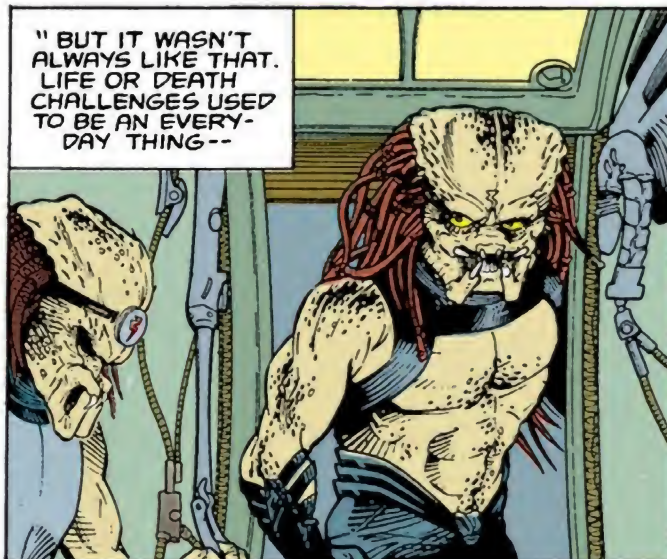


"-- AND GOING BACK TO RELYING ON OUR OWN STRENGTH AND CUNNING."

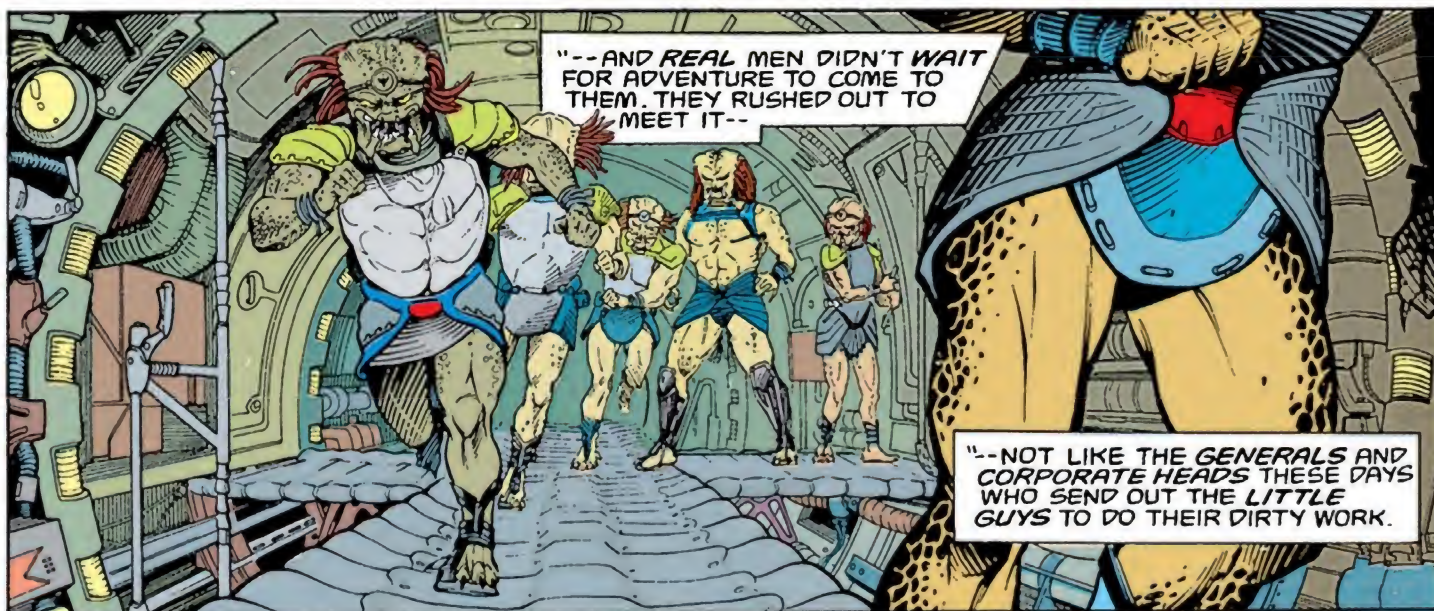
"THESE DAYS WE'RE SO INSULATED THAT WE MAKE HEROES OUT OF ANYONE WHO DARES TO FACE UP TO A CHALLENGE."



"BUT IT WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THAT. LIFE OR DEATH CHALLENGES USED TO BE AN EVERY-DAY THING--"



"--AND REAL MEN DIDN'T WAIT FOR ADVENTURE TO COME TO THEM. THEY RUSHED OUT TO MEET IT--"



"--NOT LIKE THE GENERALS AND CORPORATE HEADS THESE DAYS WHO SEND OUT THE LITTLE GUYS TO DO THEIR DIRTY WORK."

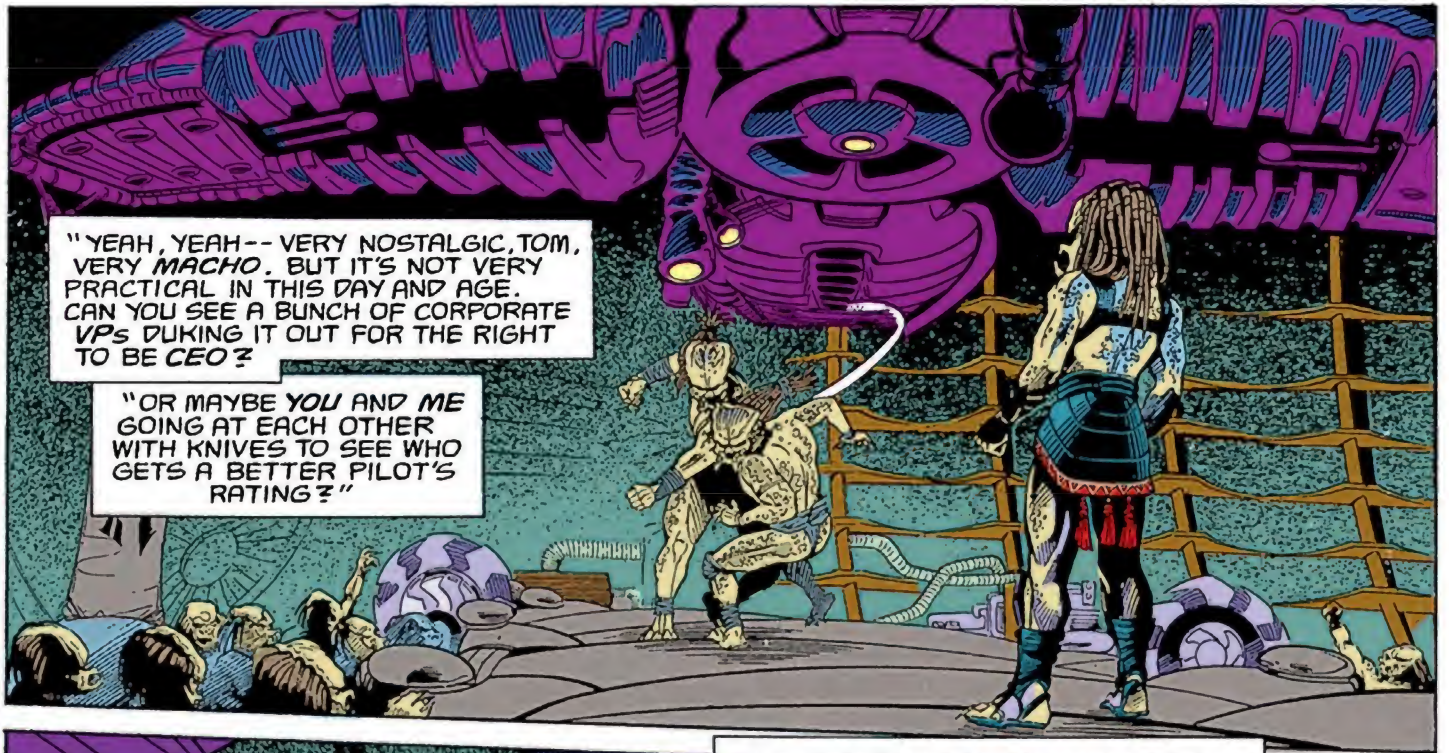


"IT USED TO BE THAT A MAN'S STANDING AS A LEADER WAS DETERMINED BY HOW HE HANDLED HIMSELF--"



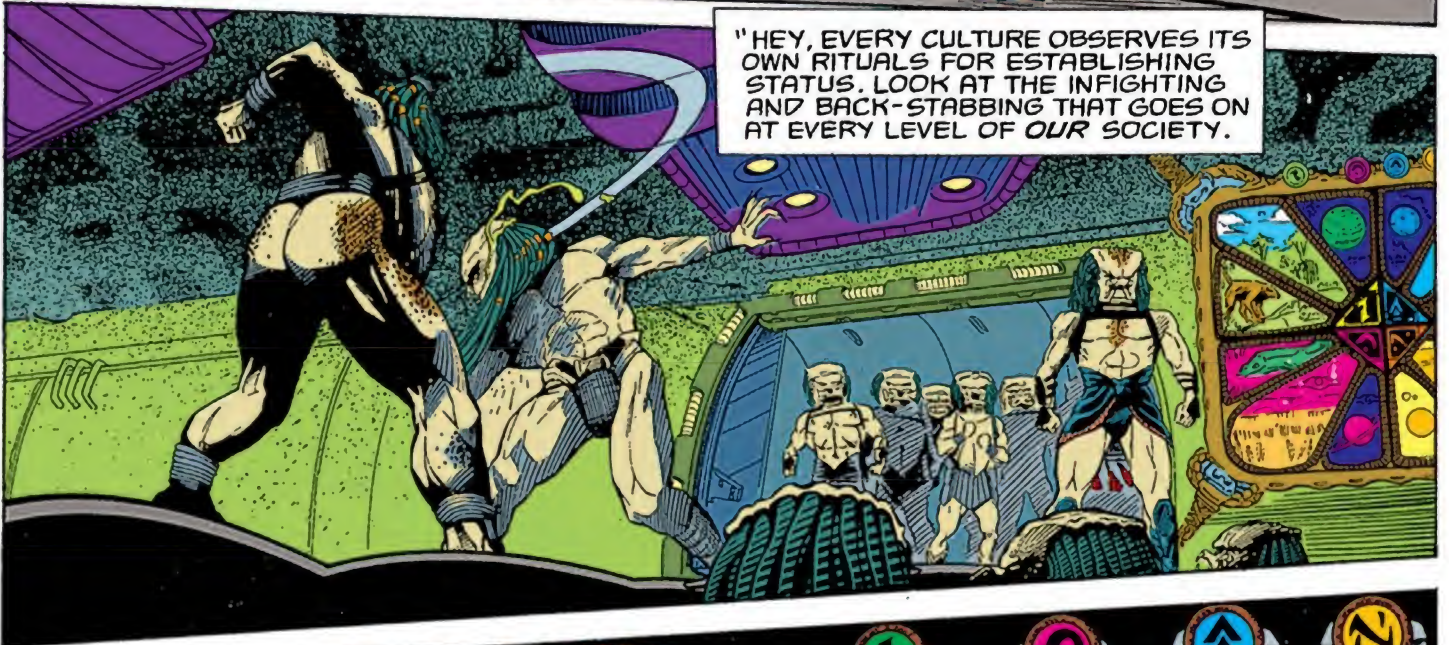
"--IN THE FACE OF DANGER."



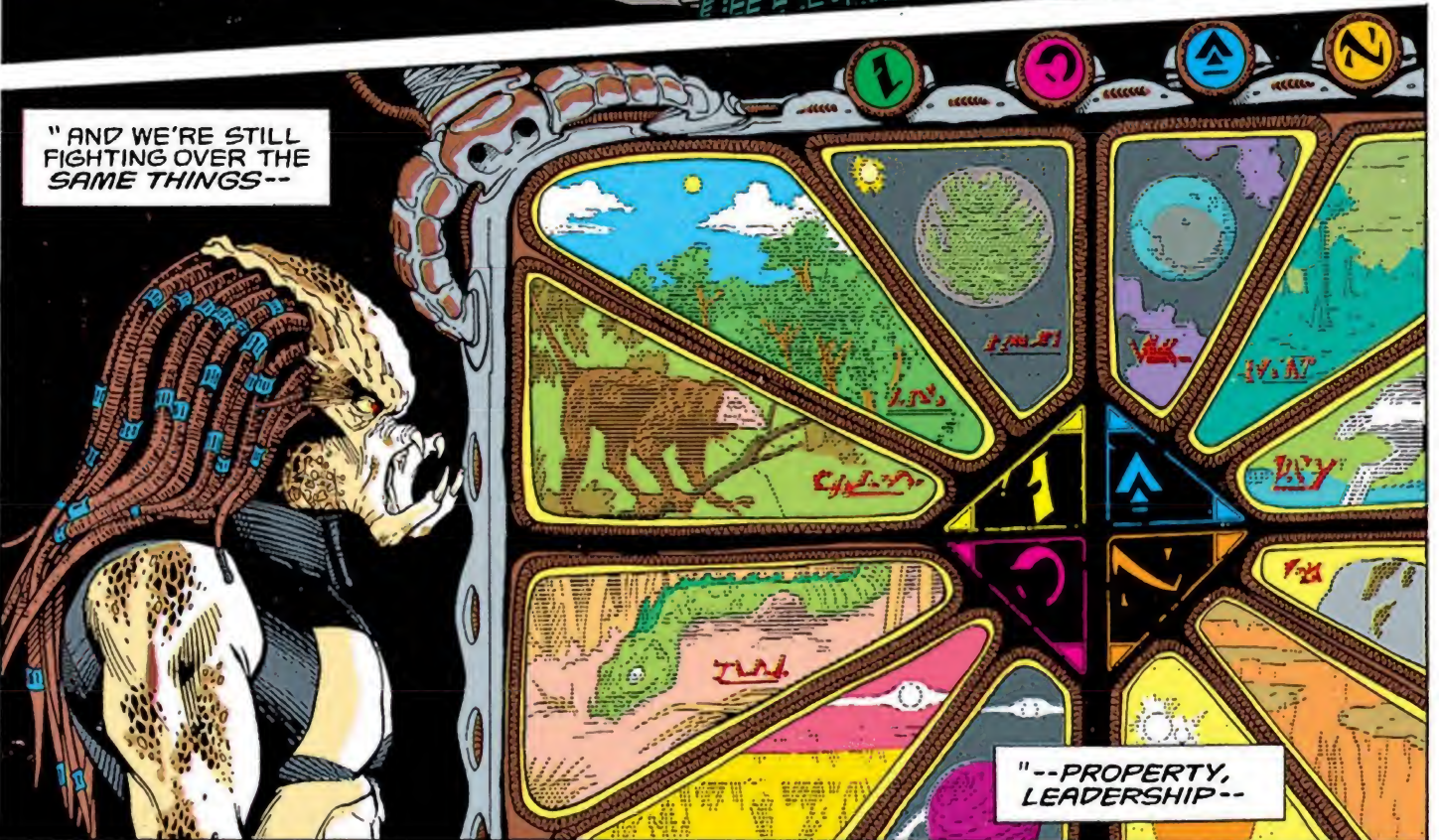


"YEAH, YEAH-- VERY NOSTALGIC, TOM, VERY *MACHO*. BUT IT'S NOT VERY PRACTICAL IN THIS DAY AND AGE. CAN YOU SEE A BUNCH OF CORPORATE VPs DUKING IT OUT FOR THE RIGHT TO BE CEO?"

"OR MAYBE *YOU* AND *ME* GOING AT EACH OTHER WITH KNIVES TO SEE WHO GETS A BETTER PILOT'S RATING?"



"HEY, EVERY CULTURE OBSERVES ITS OWN RITUALS FOR ESTABLISHING STATUS. LOOK AT THE INFIGHTING AND BACK-STABBING THAT GOES ON AT EVERY LEVEL OF *OUR* SOCIETY."



"AND WE'RE STILL FIGHTING OVER THE SAME THINGS--"

"--PROPERTY, LEADERSHIP--"



"--TERRITORIAL RIGHTS."



"THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS OUR METHODS HAVE BECOME MORE SUBTLE, LESS DIRECT."



"SOMEHOW THE OLD WAYS SEEM MORE HONEST."



"YOU'RE AN IDEALIST, TOM. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE WRONG GUY WINS?"

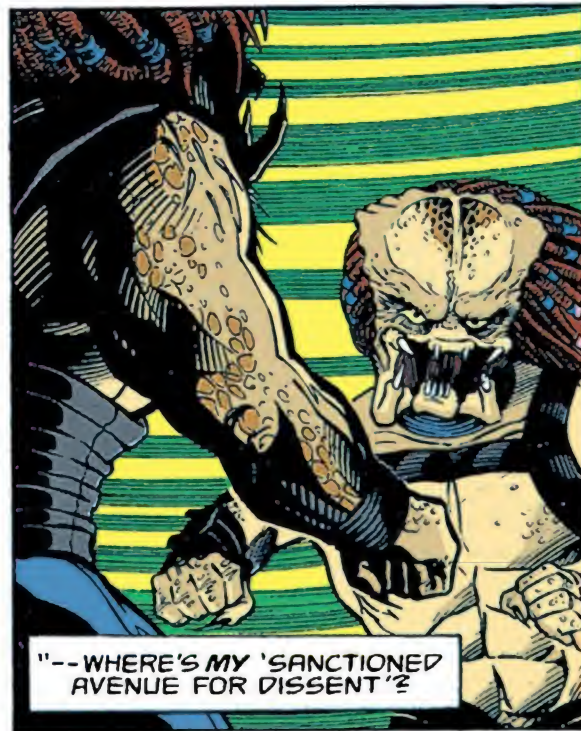
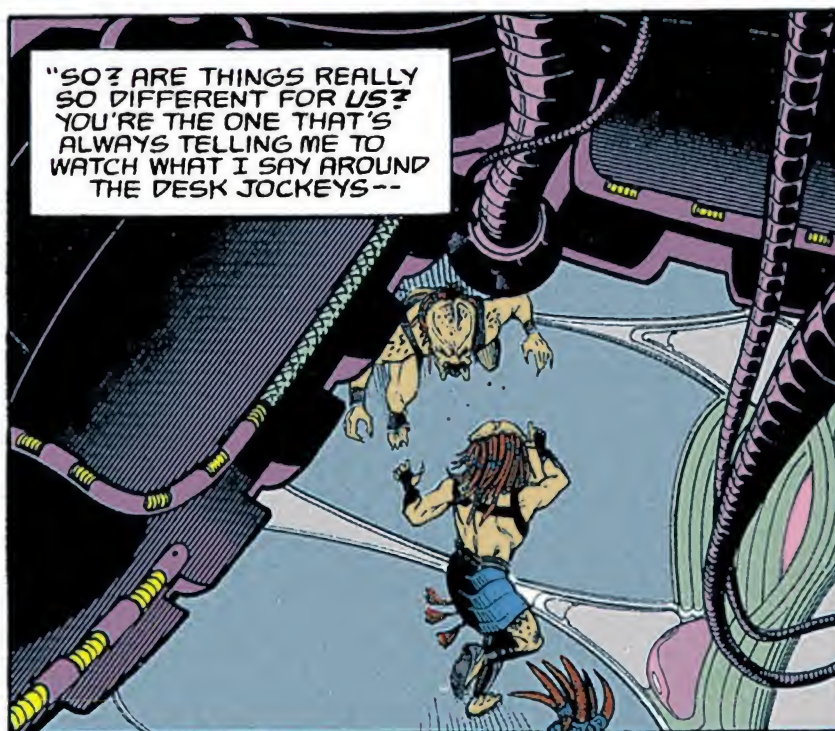
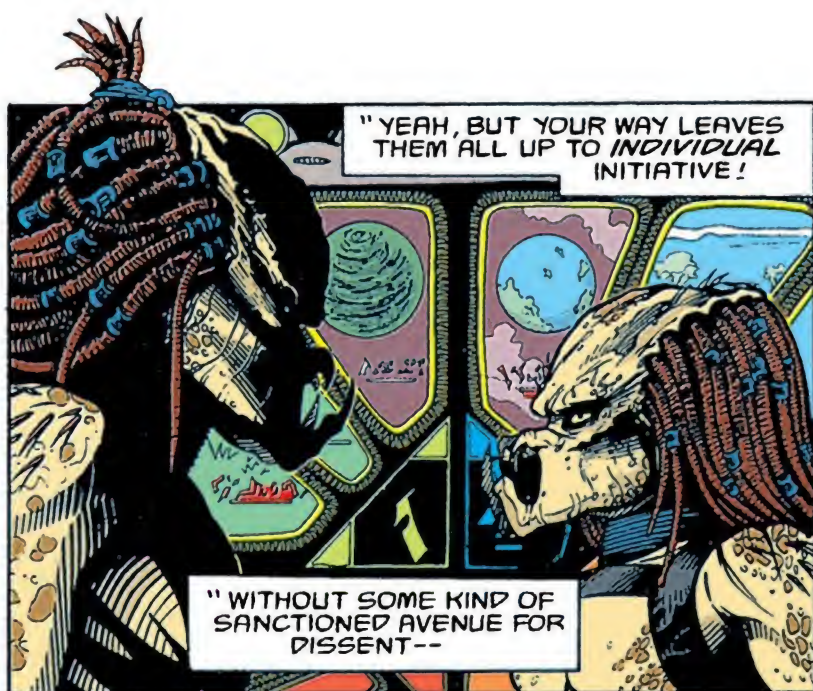


"THEN YOU'VE GOT THE NEIGHBORHOOD BULLY CALLING THE SHOTS-- YOU'RE BACK TO PACK MENTALITY."



"THERE ARE CHECKS AND BALANCES IN EVERY SYSTEM, SCOTT."



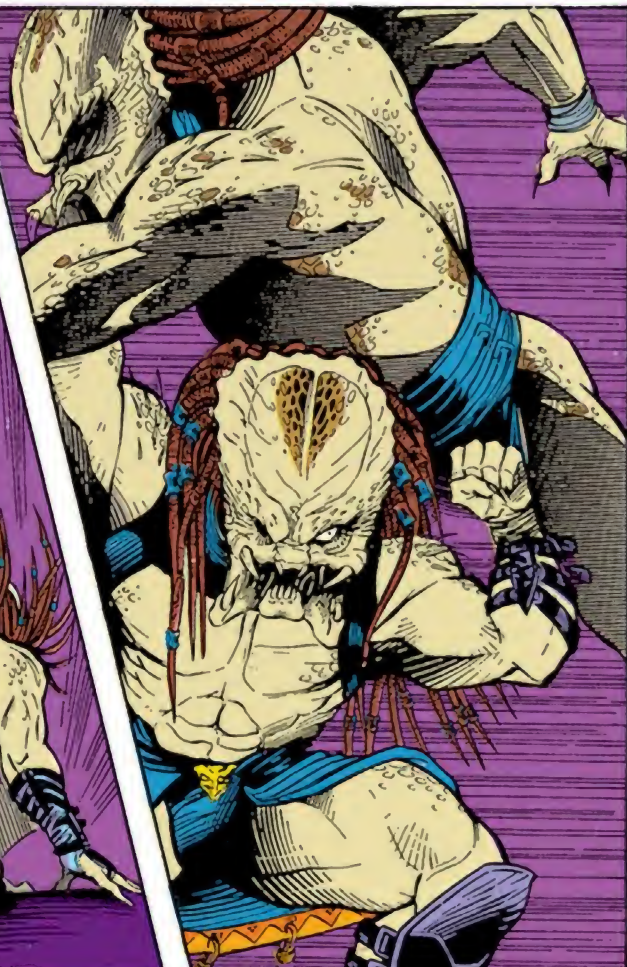


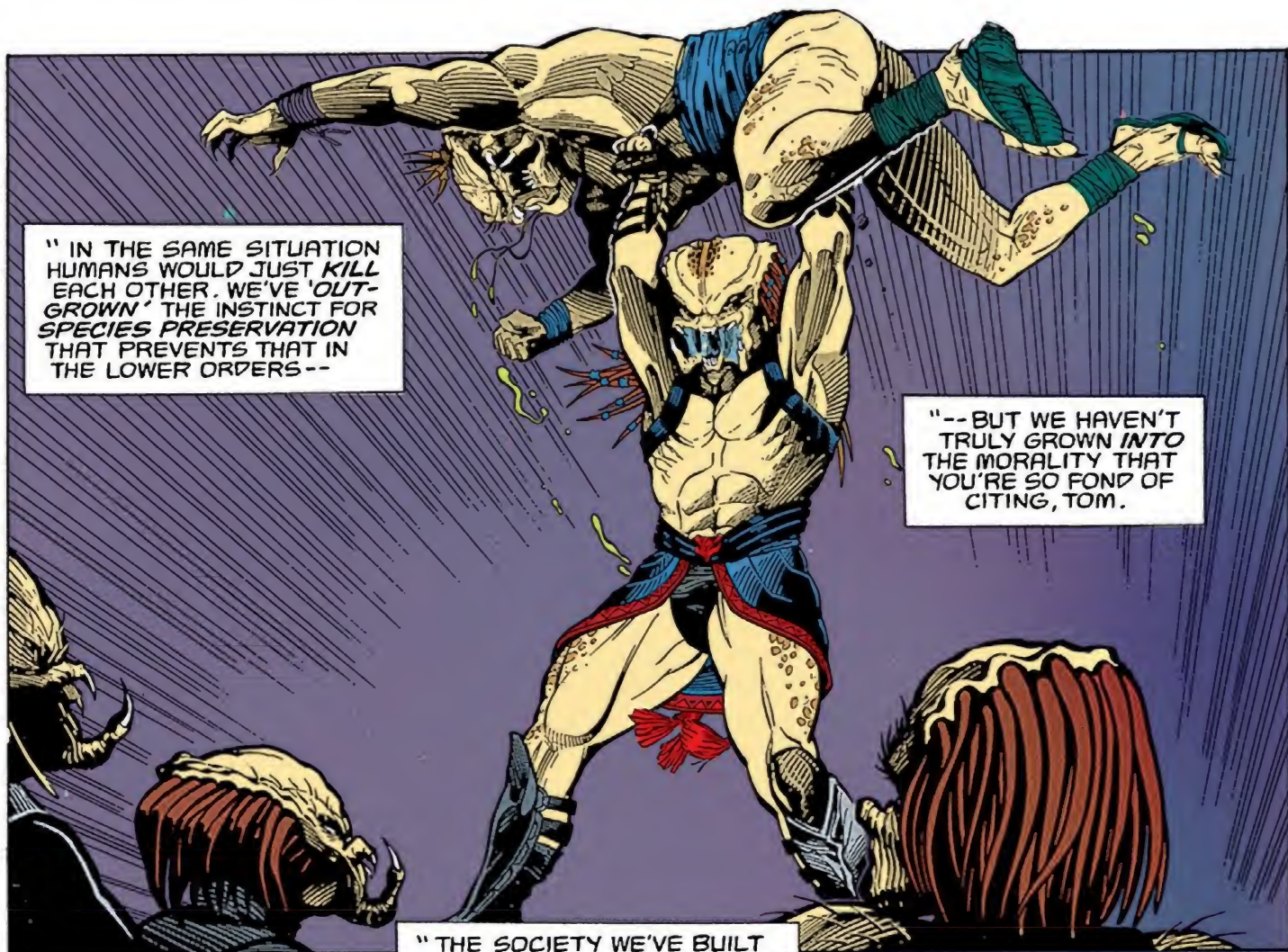


"AT LEAST IF I BUST A GUY
IN THE CHOPS, HE CLEARLY
UNDERSTANDS THAT I DON'T
LIKE WHAT HE'S DOING."



"THERE YOU GO WITH YOUR
IDEALISM AGAIN. YOU'RE
TRYING TO ROMANTICIZE THIS
INTO TWO TIGERS BRAWLING
TO DETERMINE DOMINANCE--
OR RIGHTS TO A FAVORITE
HUNTING AREA."

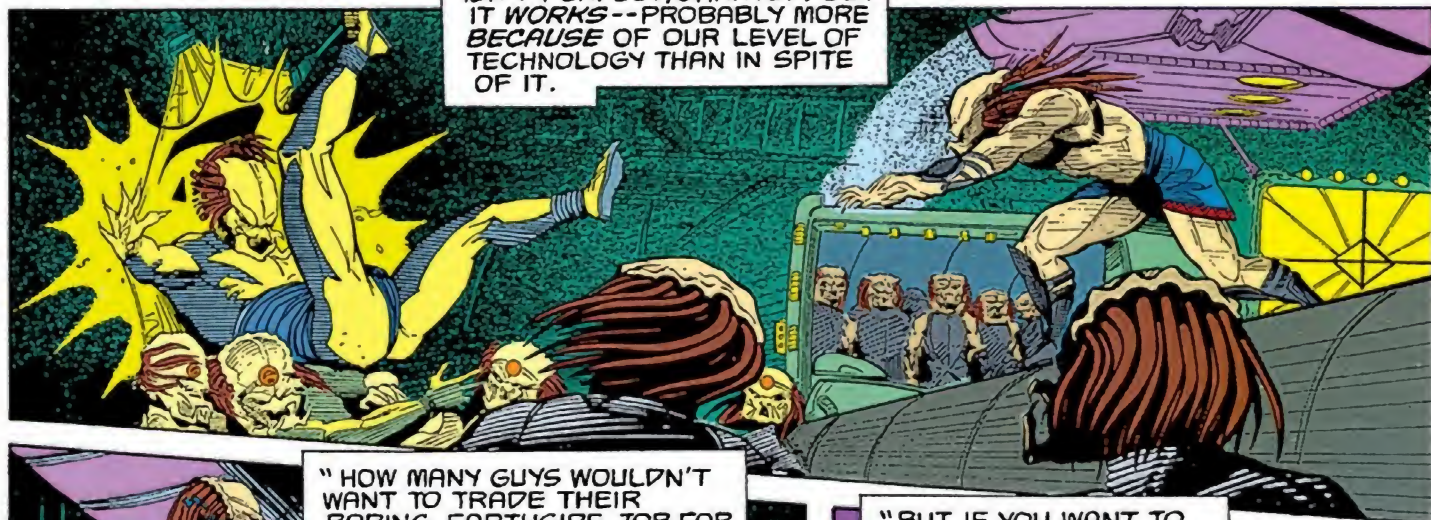




" IN THE SAME SITUATION HUMANS WOULD JUST KILL EACH OTHER. WE'VE 'OUT-GROWN' THE INSTINCT FOR SPECIES PRESERVATION THAT PREVENTS THAT IN THE LOWER ORDERS--

"-- BUT WE HAVEN'T TRULY GROWN INTO THE MORALITY THAT YOU'RE SO FOND OF CITING, TOM.

" THE SOCIETY WE'VE BUILT ISN'T PERFECT, GRANTED. BUT IT WORKS--PROBABLY MORE BECAUSE OF OUR LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGY THAN IN SPITE OF IT.



" HOW MANY GUYS WOULDN'T WANT TO TRADE THEIR BORING, EARTHSIDE JOB FOR YOURS-- A JOB MADE POSSIBLE BY TECHNOLOGY?

" BUT IF YOU WANT TO GET BACK TO NATURE, THERE ARE WAYS TO DO IT--



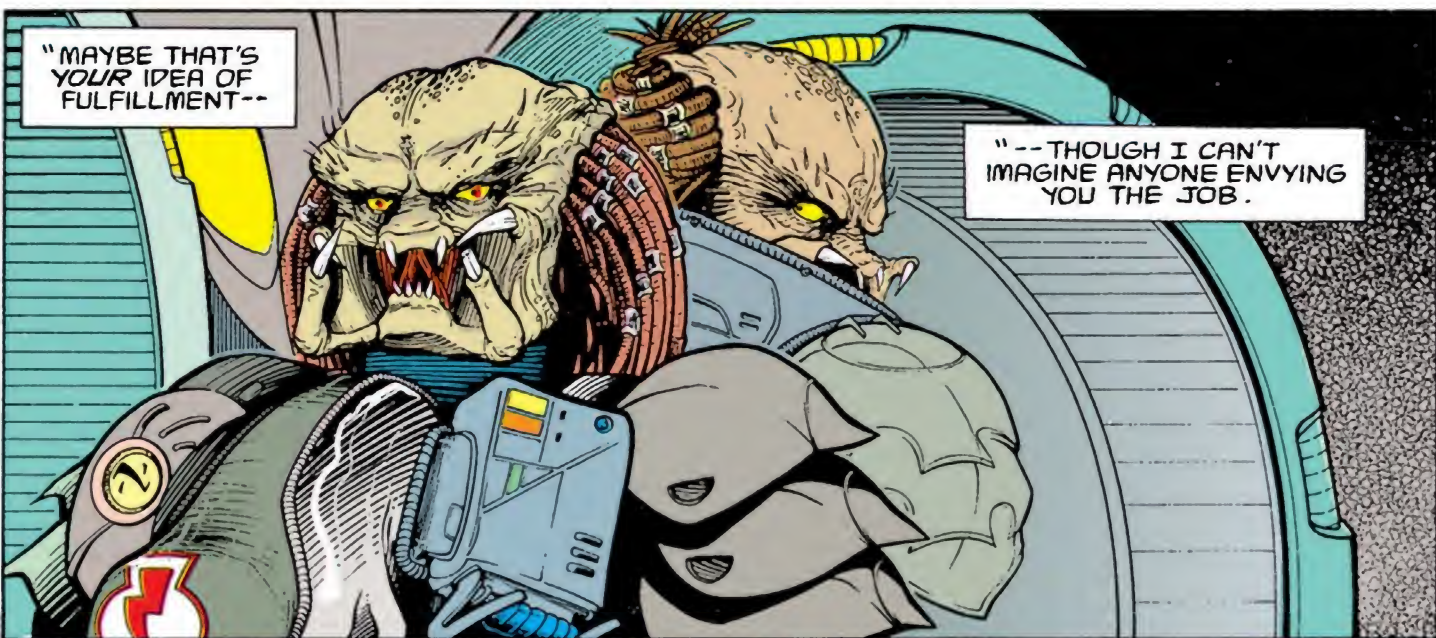
"--GO ON ONE OF THOSE 'WILDERNESS' SAFARIS TO ALPHA C. I UNDERSTAND THE GENE-SPLICERS NOW HAVE SOMETHING THAT ALMOST LOOKS LIKE AN ELEPHANT."

"OR, IF YOU WANT *REAL* ADVENTURE, SIGN ON FOR A HITCH AS A RANCH HAND AT OUR NEXT STOP-- PLENTY OF FRESH AIR, HARD WORK, AND NOT MUCH ELSE."

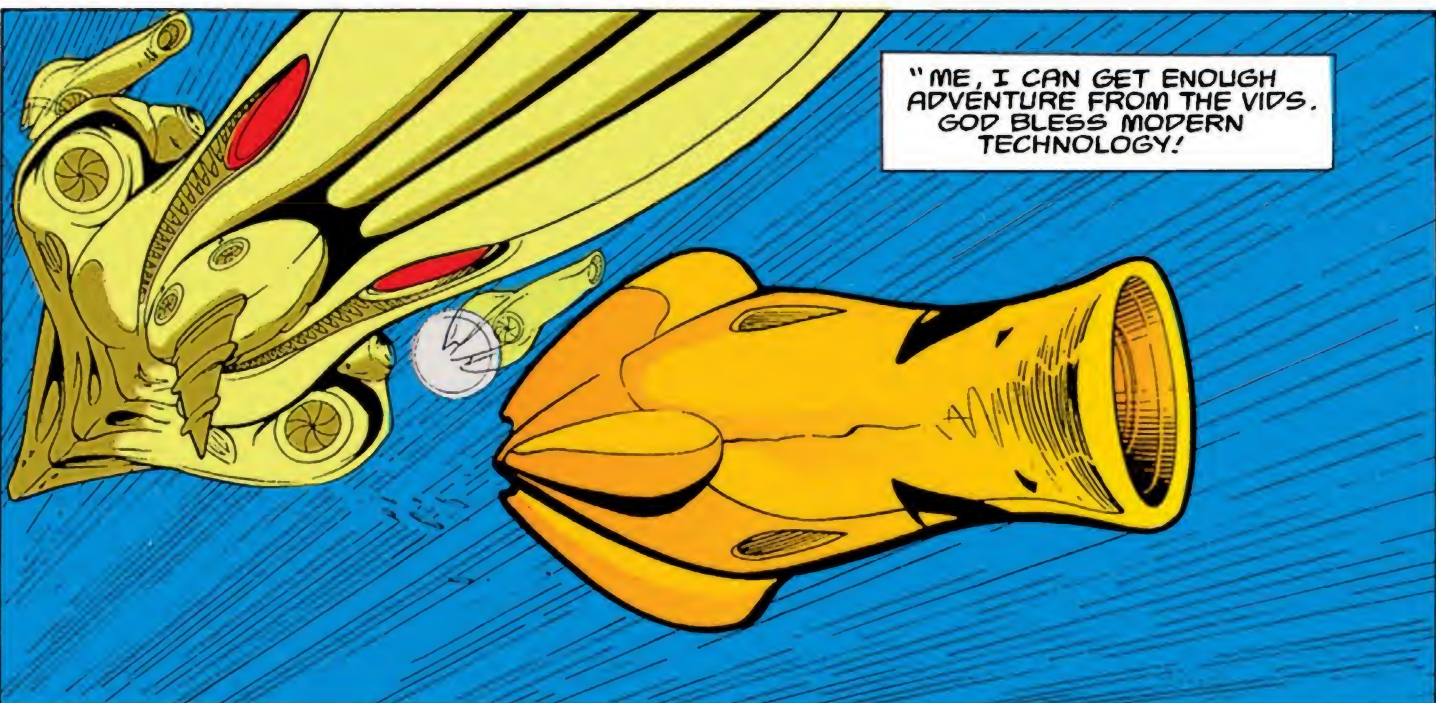


"MAYBE THAT'S YOUR IDEA OF FULFILLMENT--"

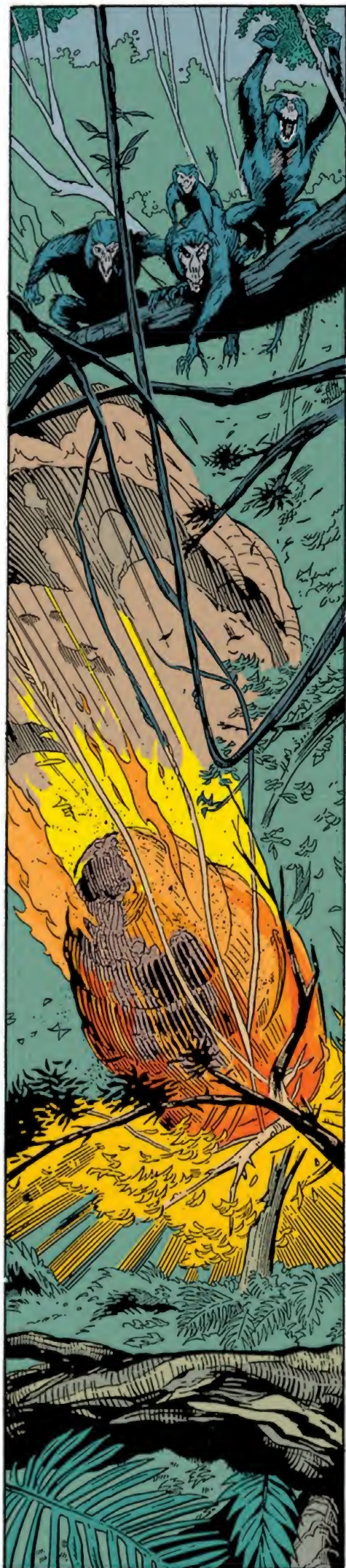
"--THOUGH I CAN'T IMAGINE ANYONE ENVYING YOU THE JOB."

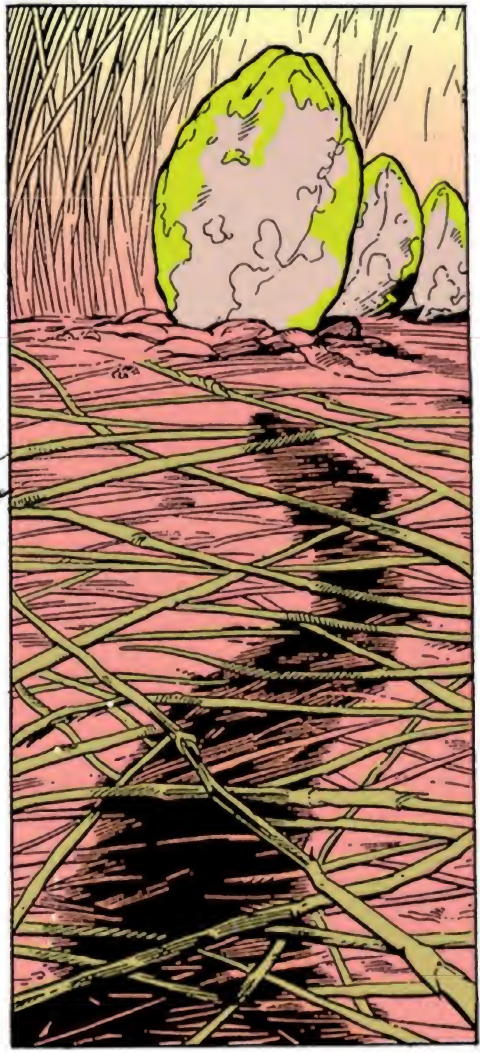
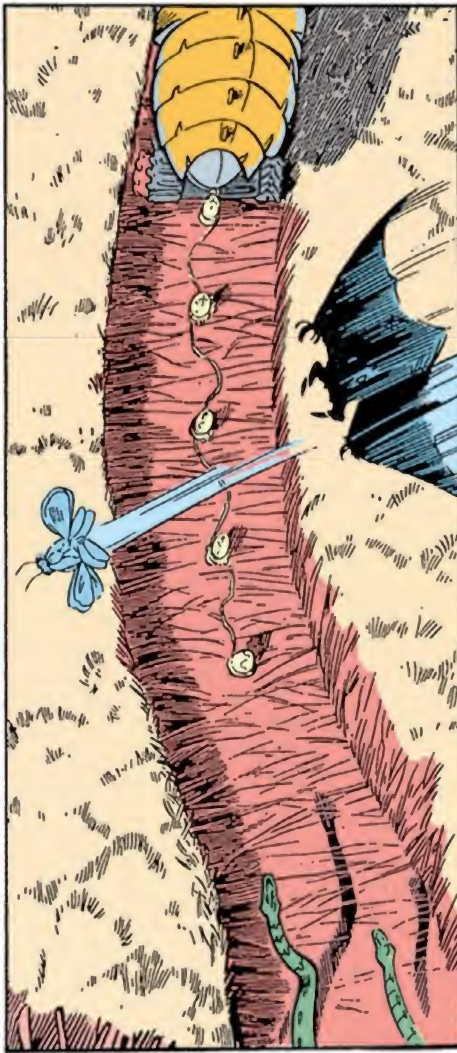
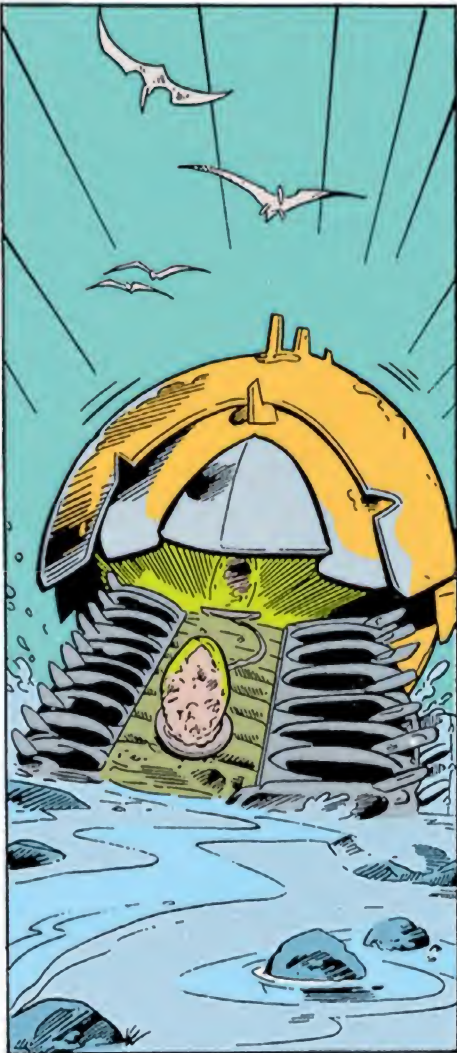
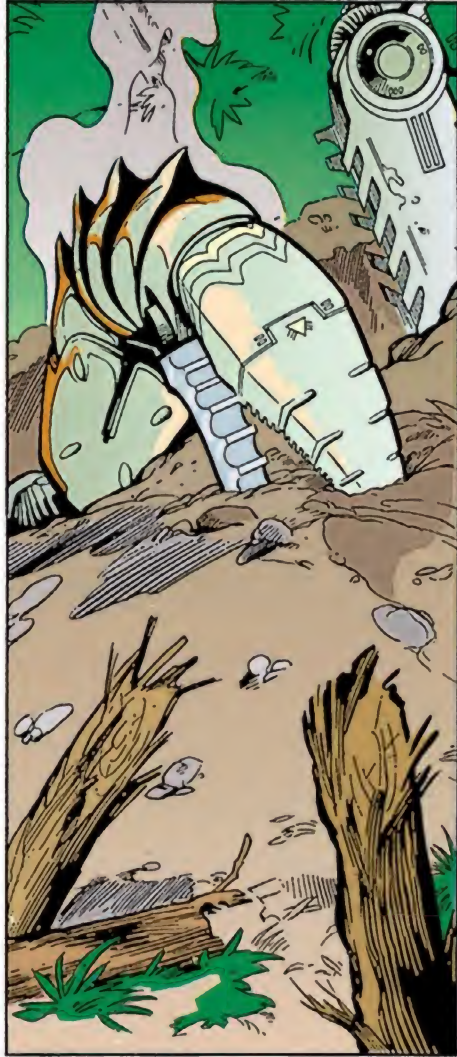


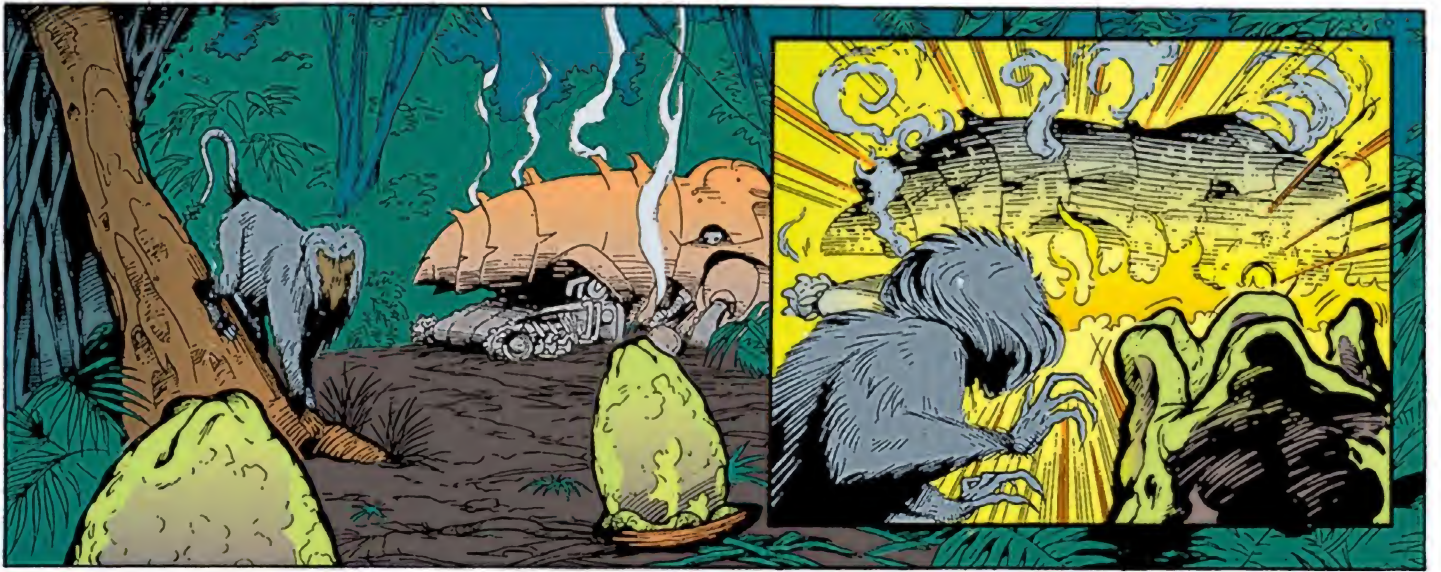
"ME, I CAN GET ENOUGH ADVENTURE FROM THE VIDS. GOD BLESS MODERN TECHNOLOGY!"













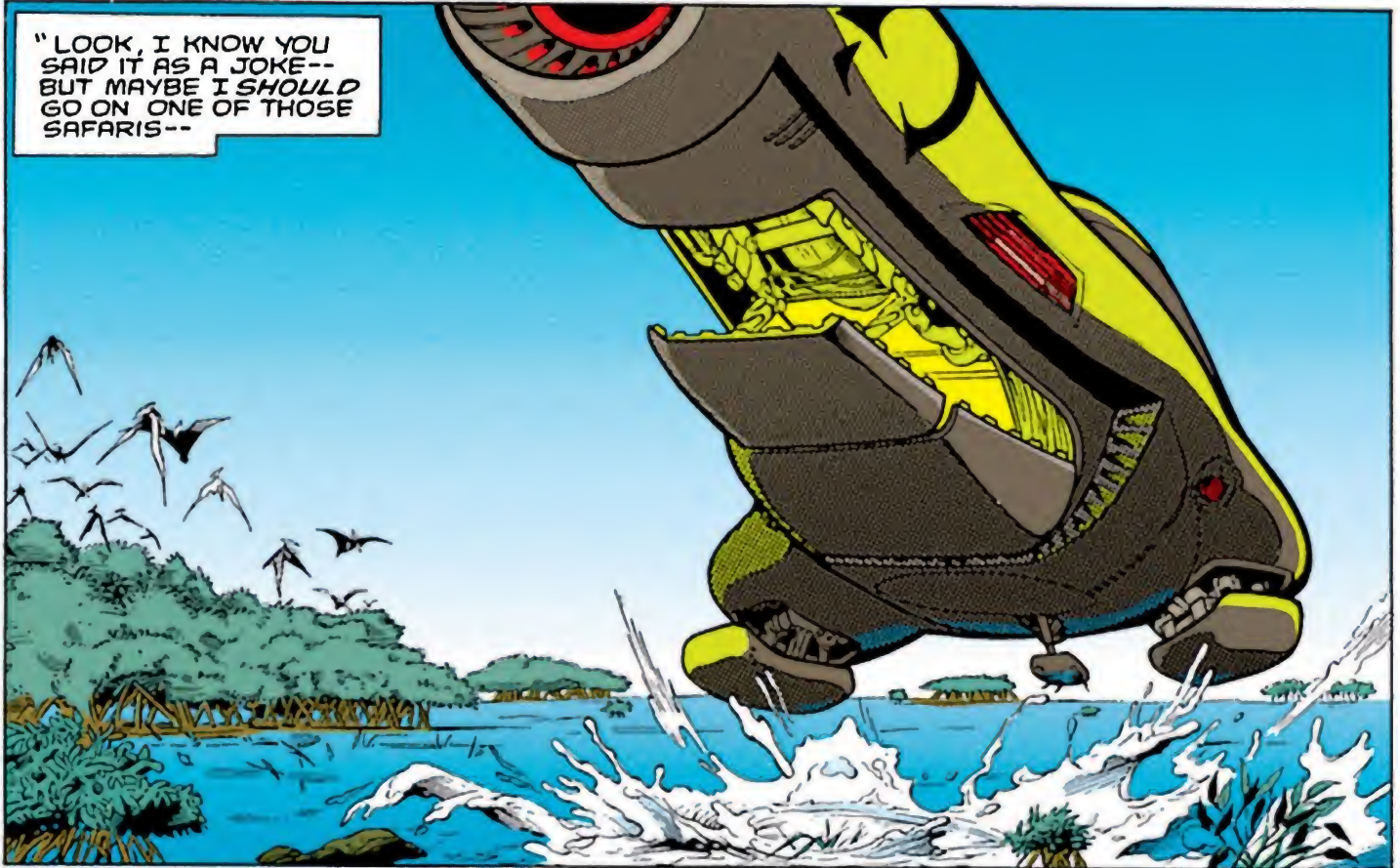
"YOU'RE BEING
AWFULLY QUIET,
TOM."



"WHAT'S THE MATTER--
YOU MAD AT ME?"



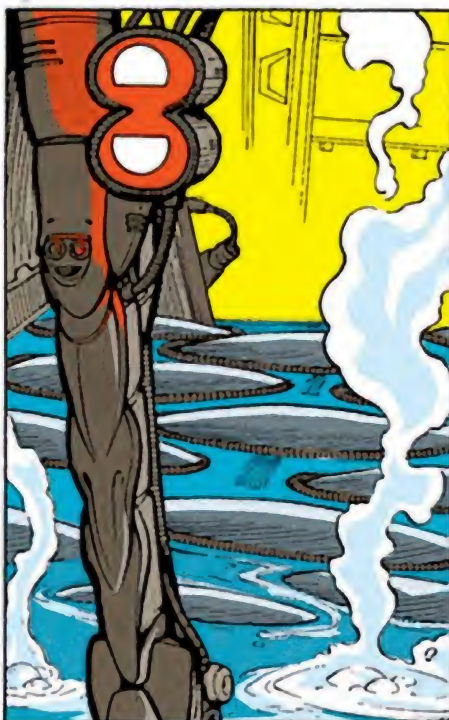
"HUH? UH, NO, SCOTT.
I WAS JUST THINKING."



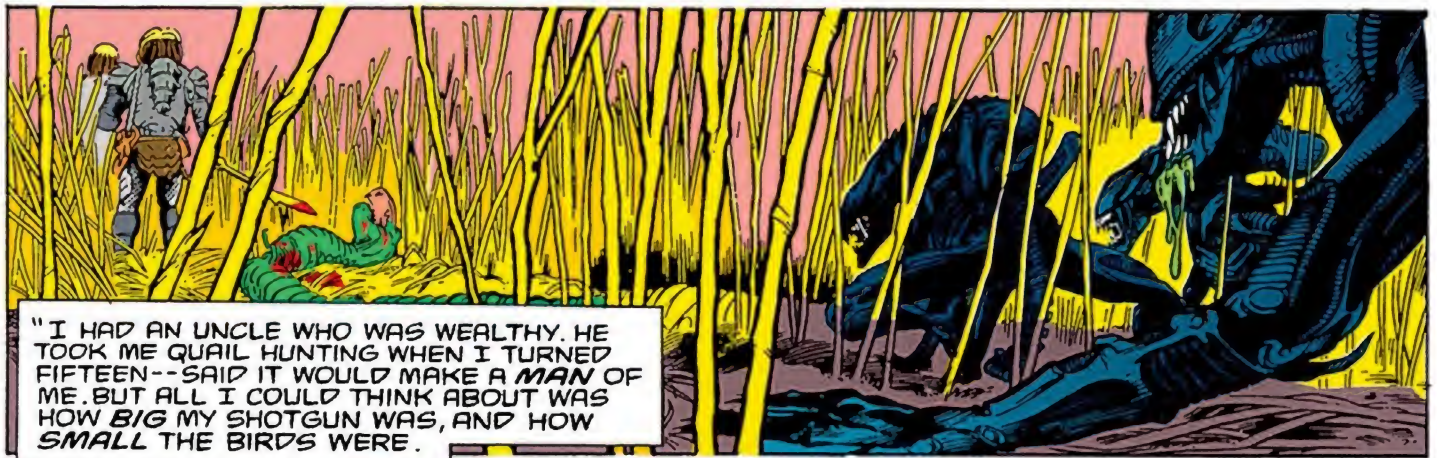
"LOOK, I KNOW YOU
SAID IT AS A JOKE--
BUT MAYBE I *SHOULD*
GO ON ONE OF THOSE
SAFARIS--"



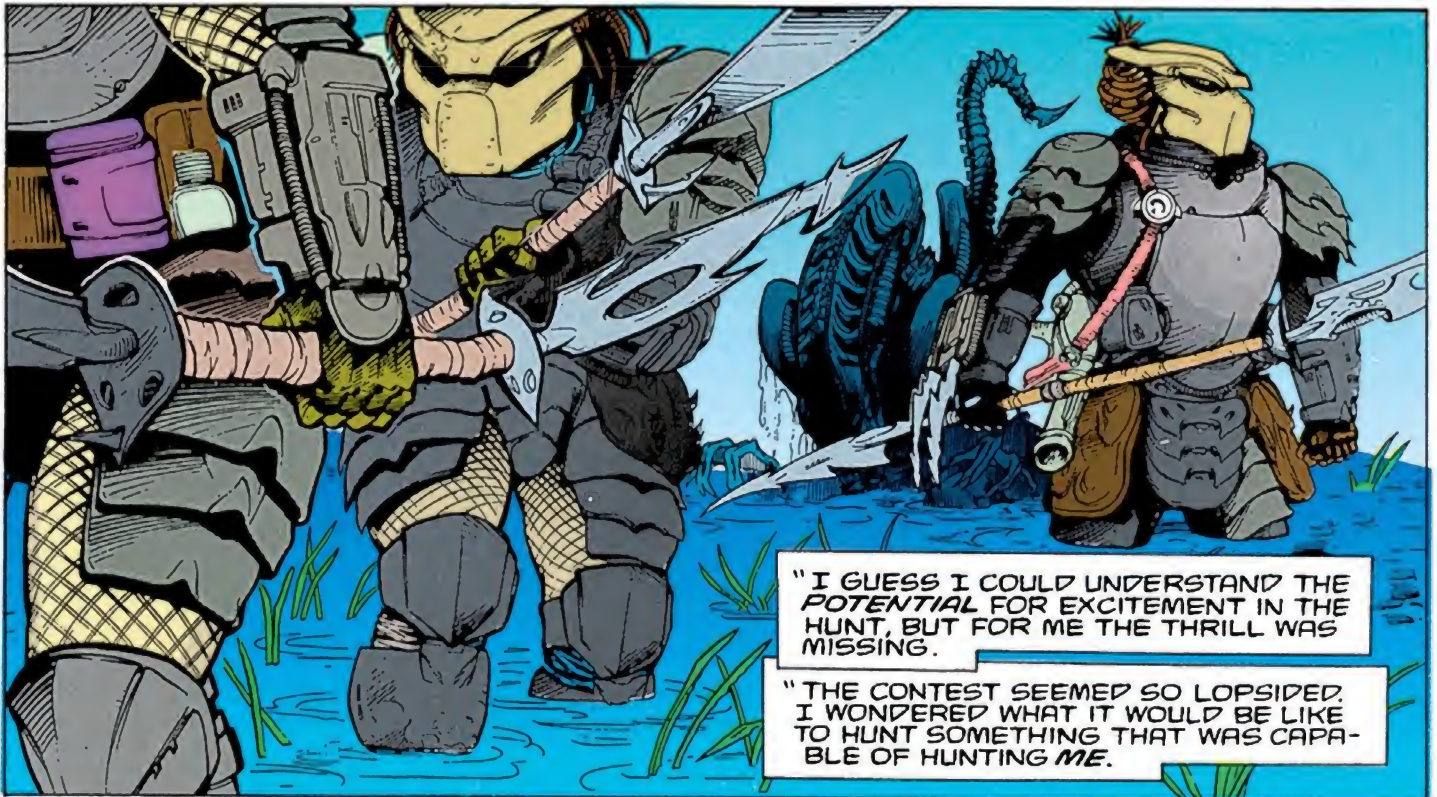
"--OR SIGN ON AS
A RANCH HAND."







"I HAD AN UNCLE WHO WAS WEALTHY. HE TOOK ME QUAIL HUNTING WHEN I TURNED FIFTEEN--SAID IT WOULD MAKE A *MAN* OF ME. BUT ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WAS HOW *BIG* MY SHOTGUN WAS, AND HOW *SMALL* THE BIRDS WERE."



"I GUESS I COULD UNDERSTAND THE *POTENTIAL* FOR EXCITEMENT IN THE HUNT, BUT FOR ME THE THRILL WAS MISSING."

"THE CONTEST SEEMED SO LOPSIDED. I WONDERED WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO HUNT SOMETHING THAT WAS CAPABLE OF HUNTING *ME*."



"THE CHALLENGE--"



"-- THE DANGER."



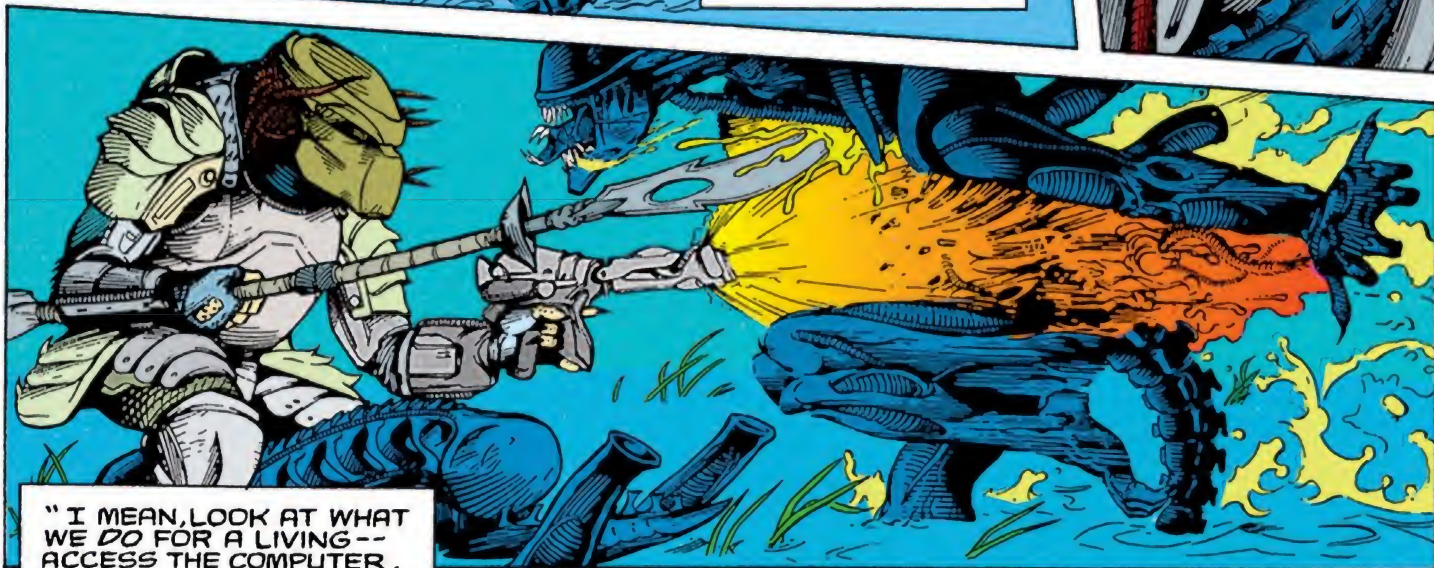
"TO PUT YOURSELF ON AN *EQUAL FOOTING* WITH NATURE--"



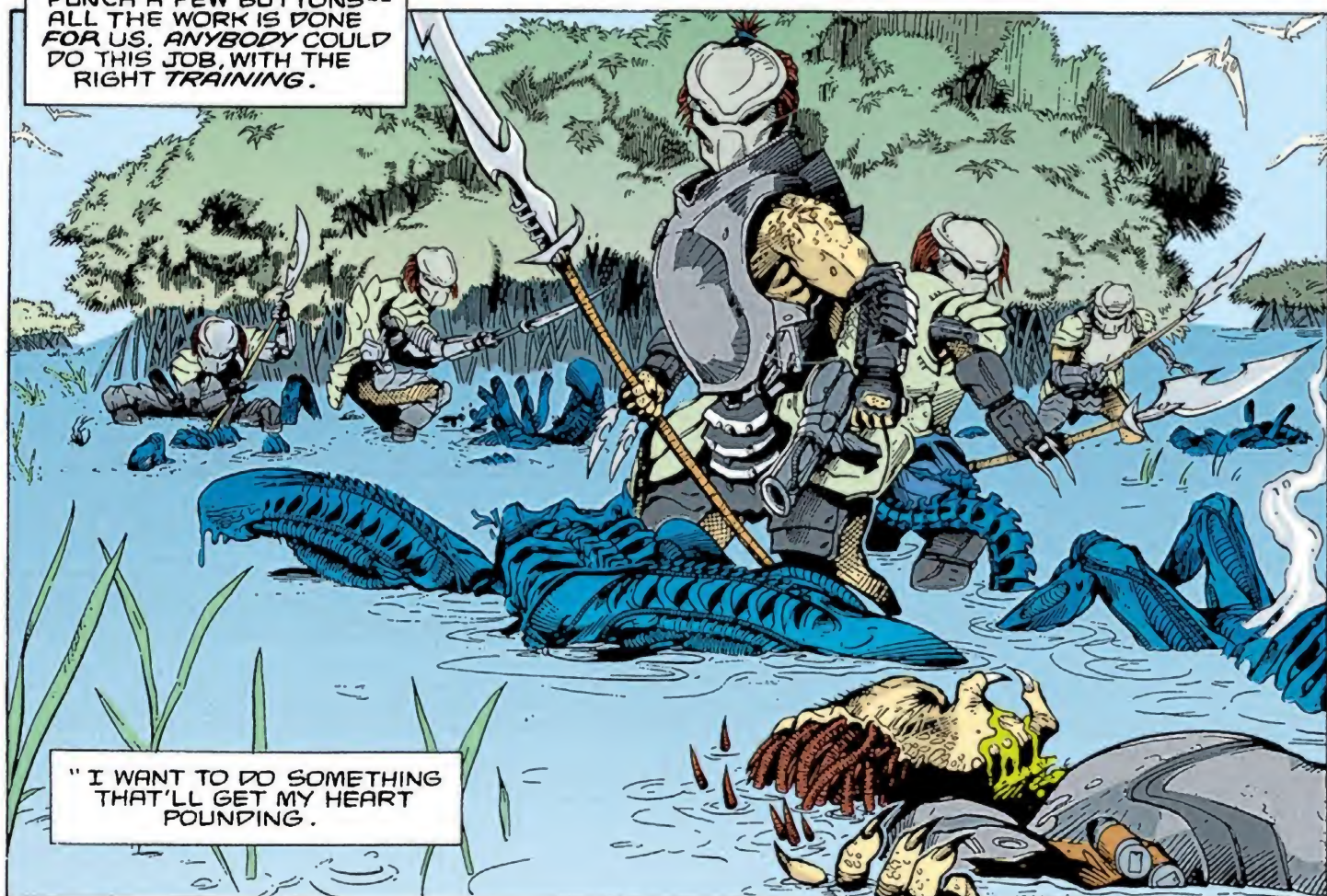
"--TO RISK *EVERY-*
THING ON YOUR
OWN SKILL AND
STRENGTH...



"...THAT'S GOT TO
BE THE *ULTIMATE*
THRILL!



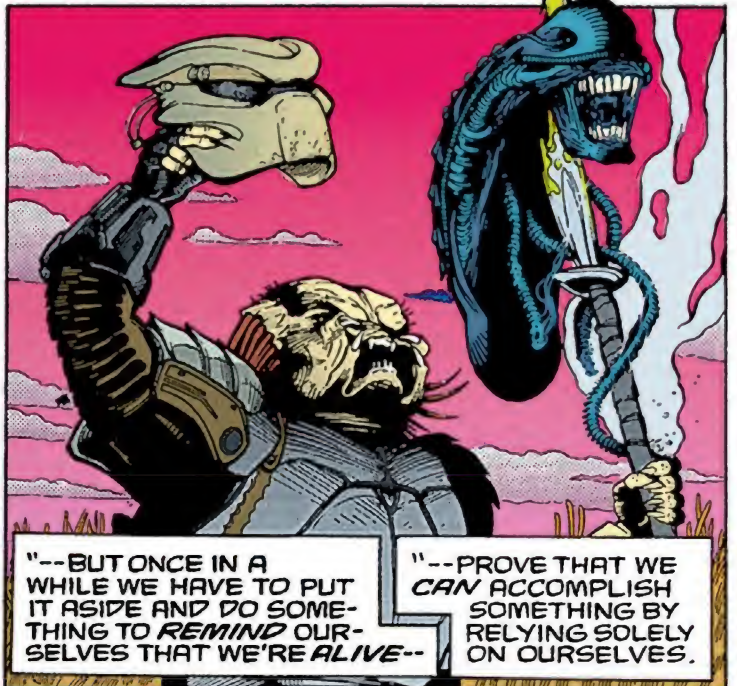
"I MEAN, LOOK AT WHAT
WE *DO* FOR A LIVING--
ACCESS THE COMPUTER--
PUNCH A FEW BUTTONS--
ALL THE WORK IS DONE
FOR US. *ANYBODY* COULD
DO THIS JOB, WITH THE
RIGHT *TRAINING*."



"I WANT TO DO SOMETHING
THAT'LL GET MY HEART
POUNDING."



"I GUESS THAT'S WHAT I MEANT BY MY ANTI-TECHNOLOGY TIRADE. IT'S NOT THAT TECHNOLOGY IS EVIL IN AND OF ITSELF--



"--BUT ONCE IN A WHILE WE HAVE TO PUT IT ASIDE AND DO SOMETHING TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT WE'RE ALIVE--

"--PROVE THAT WE CAN ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING BY RELYING SOLELY ON OURSELVES.



"I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK AN EXPERIENCE LIKE THAT WOULD CHANGE A PERSON--

"--MAYBE NOT IN A WAY THAT OTHER PEOPLE WOULD NOTICE--

"--BUT IT WOULD BE SOMETHING YOU'D CARRY WITH YOU FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE."

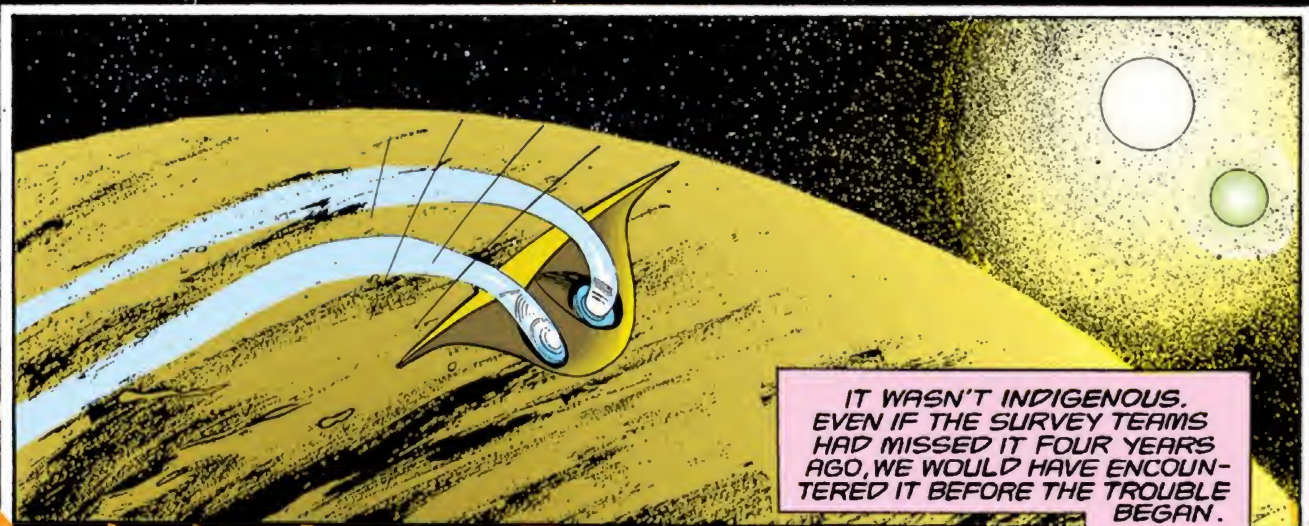
"I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, TOM. KINDA LIKE THE FIRST TIME YOU GET LAID, RIGHT? DID I EVER TELL YOU ABOUT THAT? I WAS AT THIS PARTY, SEE, AND--"

"OH, BROTHER..."

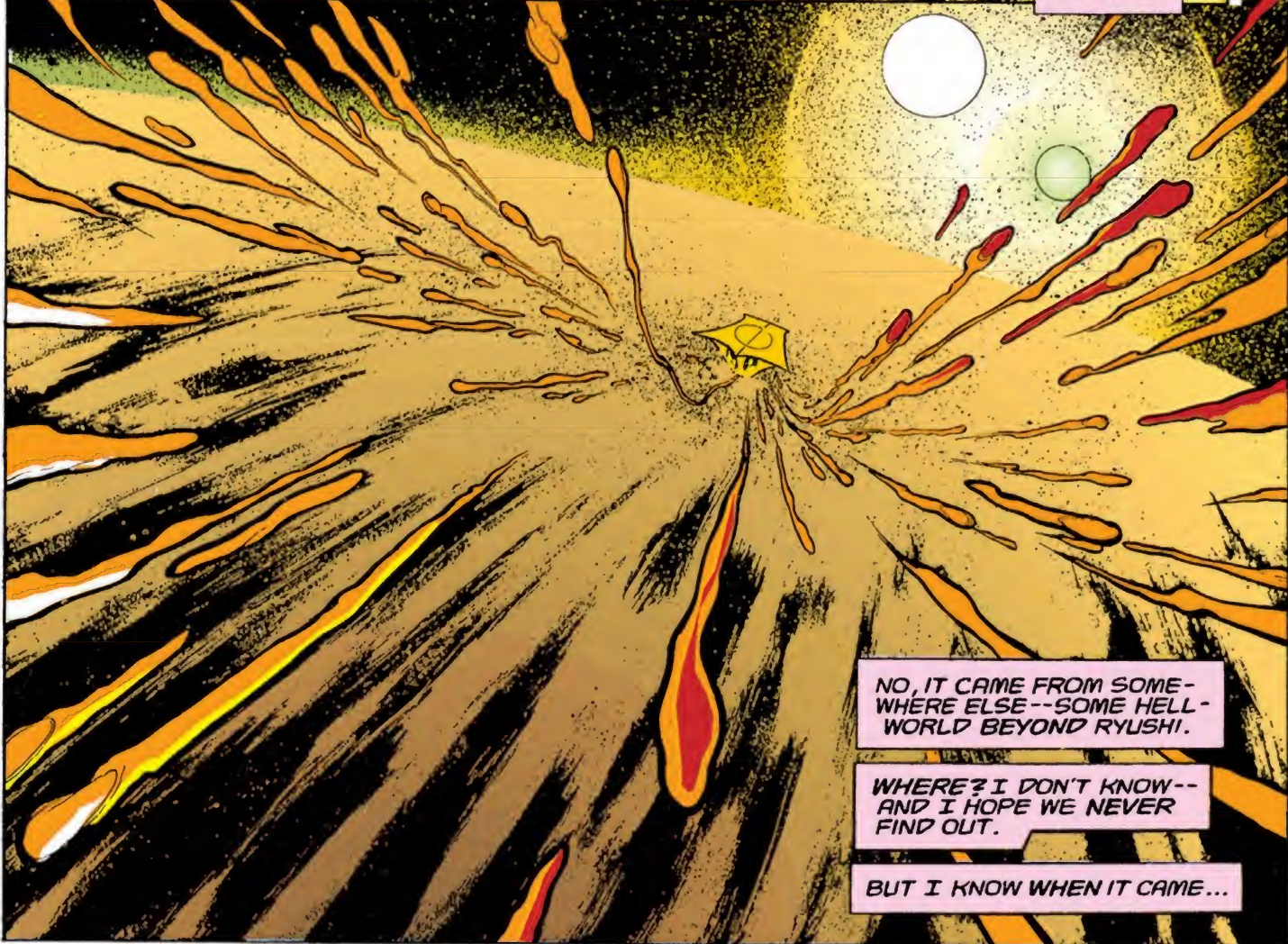




THE 'TERROR' CAME FROM THE STARS.



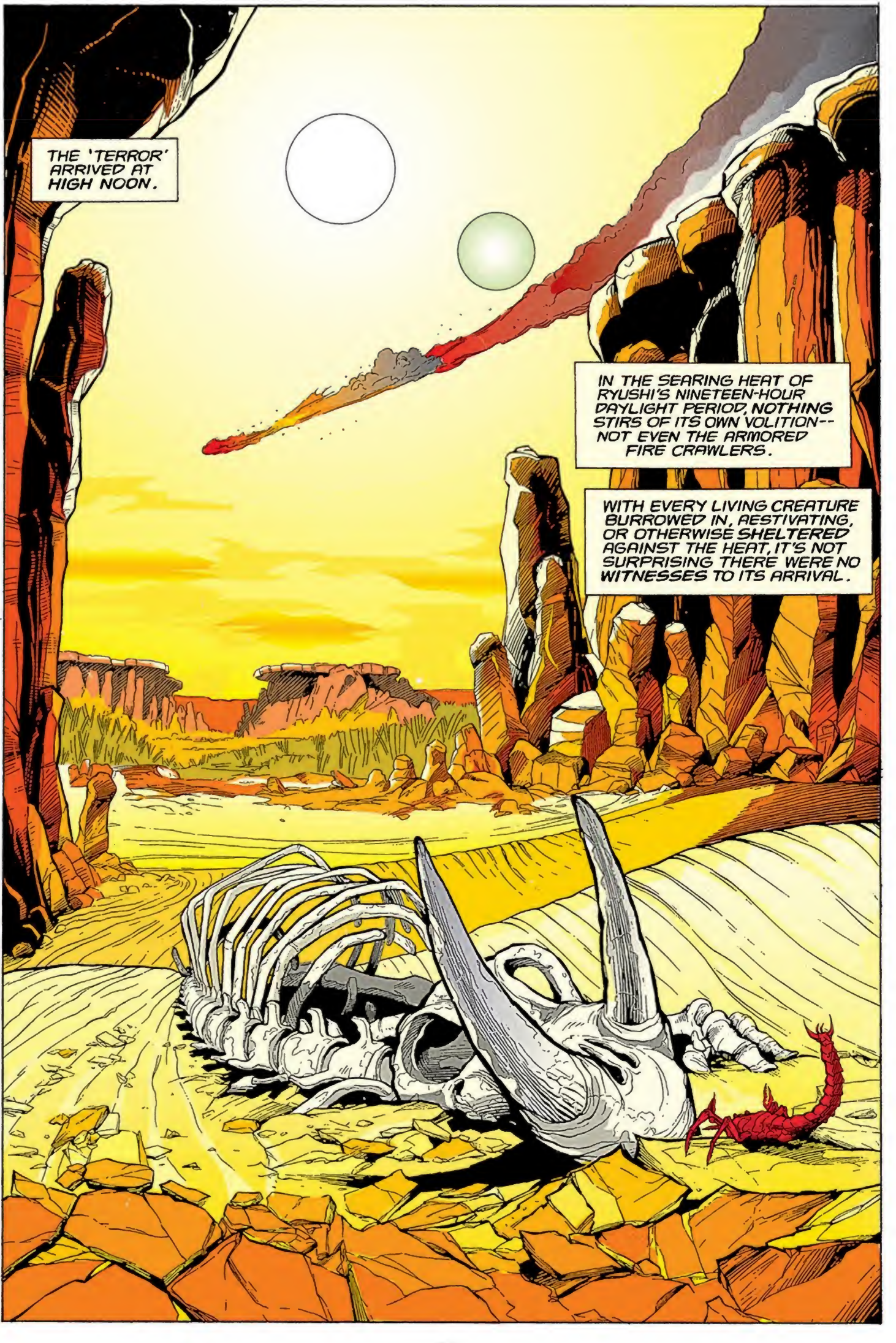
IT WASN'T INDIGENOUS. EVEN IF THE SURVEY TEAMS HAD MISSED IT FOUR YEARS AGO, WE WOULD HAVE ENCOUNTERED IT BEFORE THE TROUBLE BEGAN.



NO, IT CAME FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE--SOME HELL-WORLD BEYOND RYUSHI.

WHERE? I DON'T KNOW--AND I HOPE WE NEVER FIND OUT.

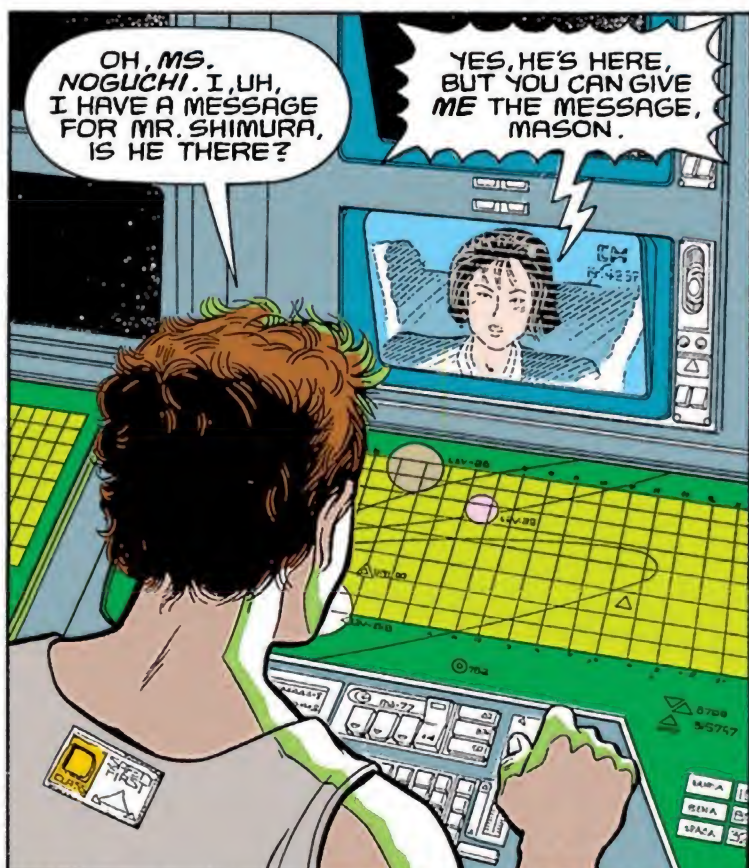
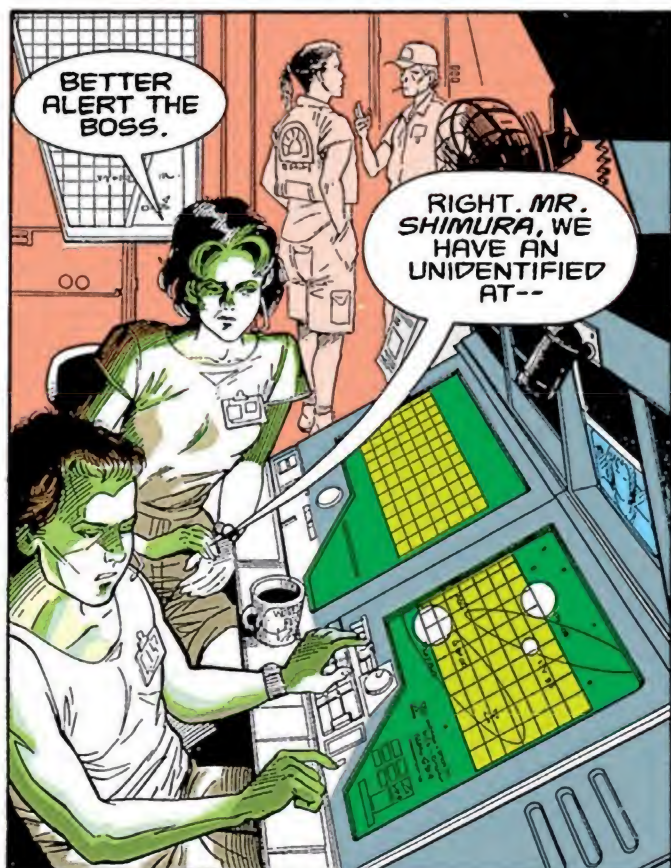
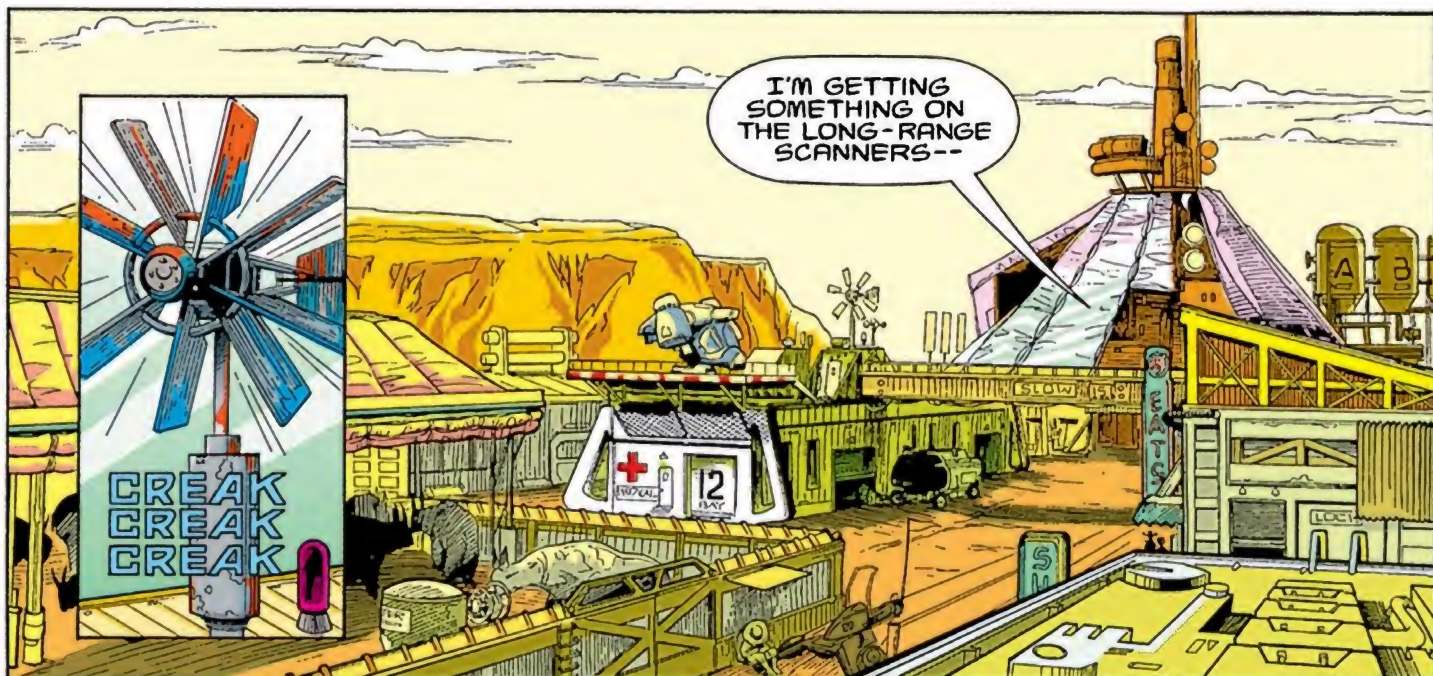
BUT I KNOW WHEN IT CAME...

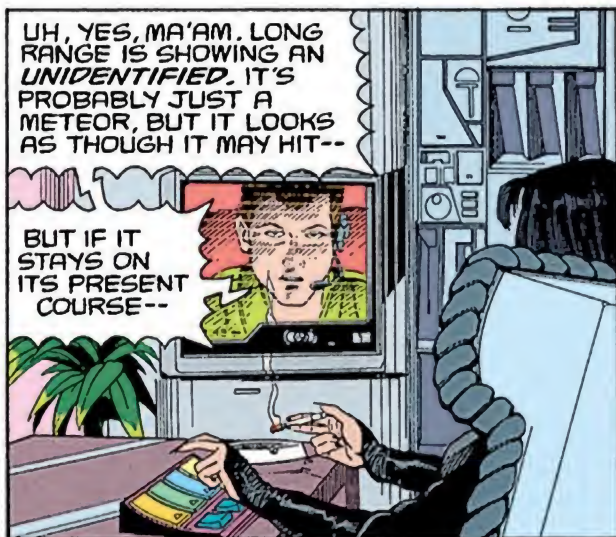


THE 'TERROR'
ARRIVED AT
HIGH NOON.

IN THE SEARING HEAT OF
RYUSHI'S NINETEEN-HOUR
DAYLIGHT PERIOD, NOTHING
STIRS OF ITS OWN VOLITION--
NOT EVEN THE ARMORED
FIRE CRAWLERS.

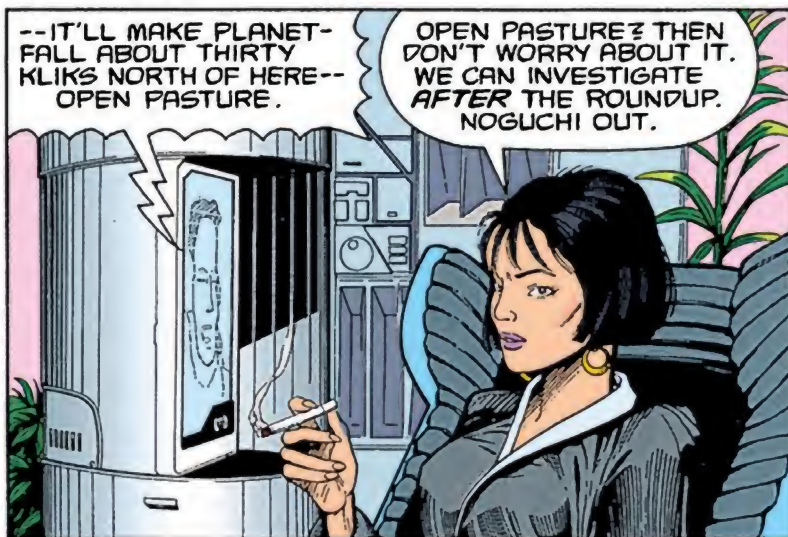
WITH EVERY LIVING CREATURE
BURROWED IN, AESTIVATING,
OR OTHERWISE SHELTERED
AGAINST THE HEAT, IT'S NOT
SURPRISING THERE WERE NO
WITNESSES TO ITS ARRIVAL.





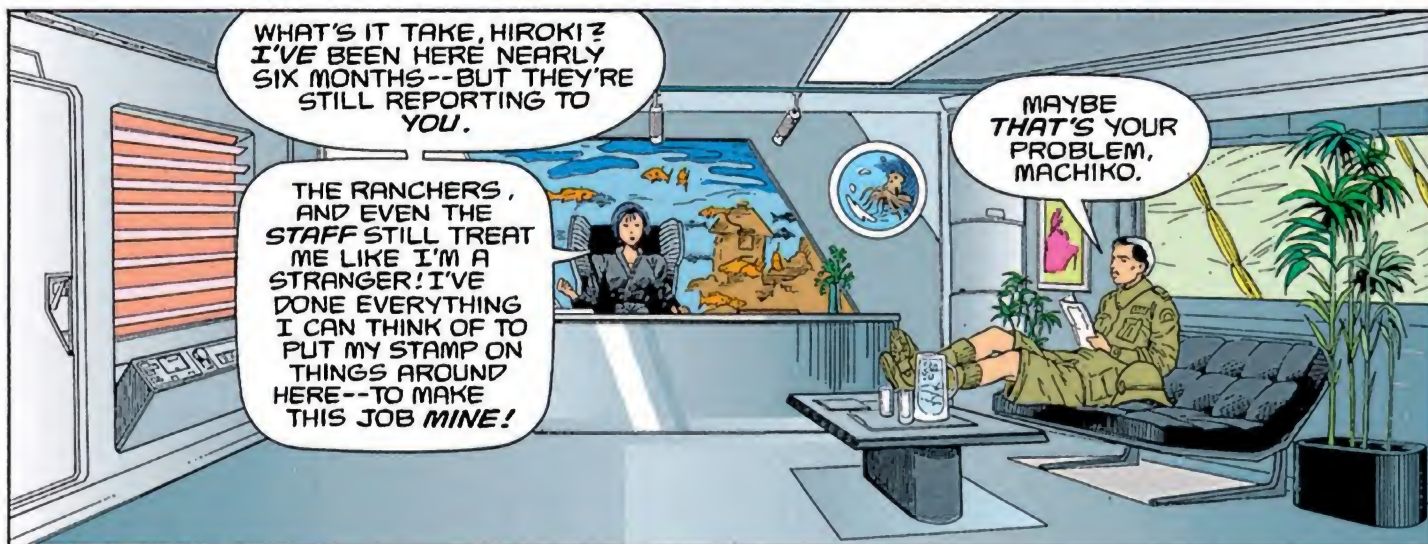
UH, YES, MA'AM. LONG RANGE IS SHOWING AN **UNIDENTIFIED**. IT'S PROBABLY JUST A METEOR, BUT IT LOOKS AS THOUGH IT MAY HIT--

BUT IF IT STAYS ON ITS PRESENT COURSE--



--IT'LL MAKE PLANET-FALL ABOUT THIRTY KLIKS NORTH OF HERE-- OPEN PASTURE.

OPEN PASTURE? THEN DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. WE CAN INVESTIGATE **AFTER** THE ROUNDUP. NOGUCHI OUT.



WHAT'S IT TAKE, HIROKI? I'VE BEEN HERE NEARLY SIX MONTHS--BUT THEY'RE STILL REPORTING TO **YOU**.

THE RANCHERS, AND EVEN THE **STAFF** STILL TREAT ME LIKE I'M A STRANGER! I'VE DONE EVERYTHING I CAN THINK OF TO PUT MY STAMP ON THINGS AROUND HERE--TO MAKE THIS JOB **MINE**!

MAYBE **THAT'S** YOUR PROBLEM, MACHIKO.



YOU'RE TRYING TO ADAPT THE JOB TO **YOU**, RATHER THAN ADAPTING YOURSELF TO IT.

THIS IS A VERY NICE OFFICE YOU'VE BUILT FOR YOURSELF, BUT YOU CAN'T **RUN** AN OPERATION LIKE THIS AND **HIDE** FROM IT AT THE SAME TIME.



WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY, HIROKI?

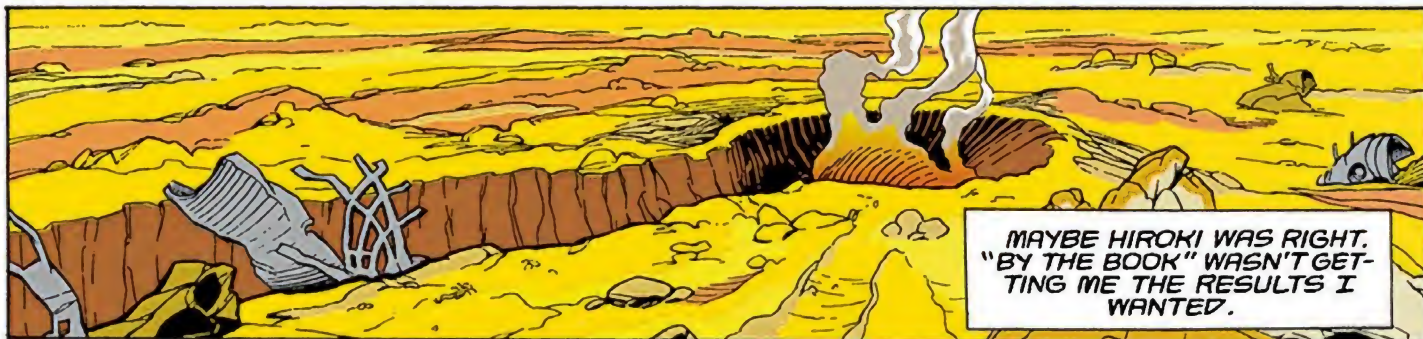
LOOK, I'LL BE AROUND FOR ANOTHER WEEK OR SO--AFTER THAT YOU'RE ON YOUR **OWN**. IN THE MEAN-TIME, I'LL DO WHATEVER I CAN TO HELP YOU.



HIROKI...

DON'T FORGET THAT THESE ARE **HUMAN BEINGS** YOU'RE DEALING WITH. **TREAT** THEM AS SUCH. AND IT WOULDN'T HURT FOR YOU TO LOOSEN UP SOME, EITHER.

GET OUT OF YOUR OFFICE ONCE IN AWHILE. GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY. GET SOME **RHYNTH-SHIT** BETWEEN YOUR TOES.



MAYBE HIROKI WAS RIGHT.
"BY THE BOOK" WASN'T GET-
TING ME THE RESULTS I
WANTED.



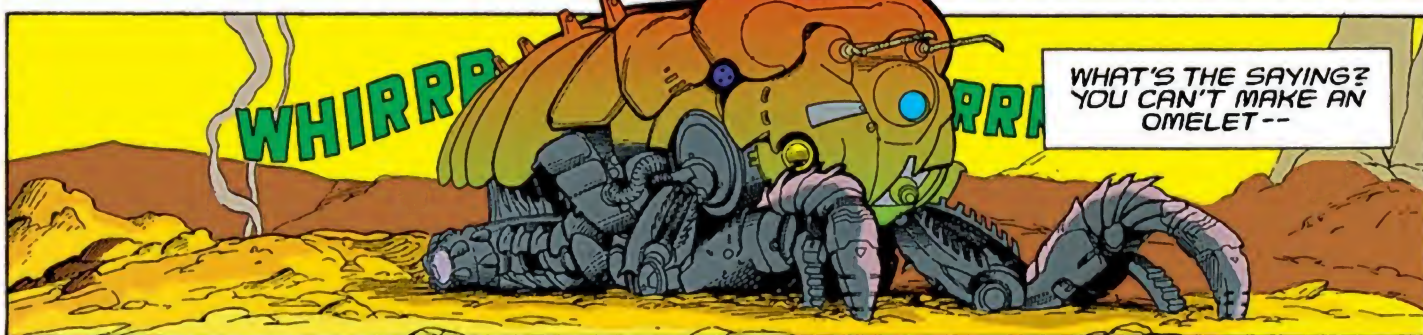
AND I'D SEEN PLENTY OF
OTHER EXECS WHO HAD TRIED
TO MAKE A CAREER OUT OF
KEEPING A LOW PROFILE--



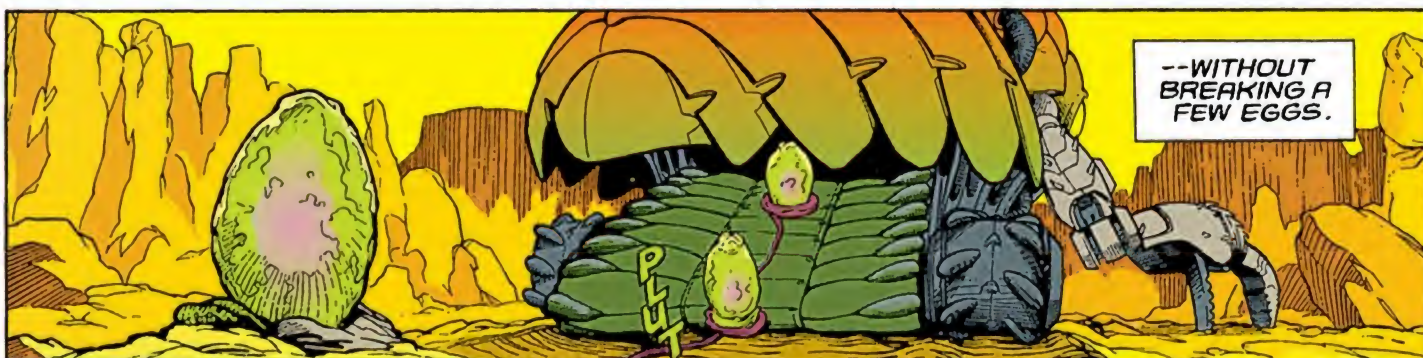
--LEFT TWISTING IN THE
WIND WHEN THE POLITICAL
CLIMATE CHANGED.



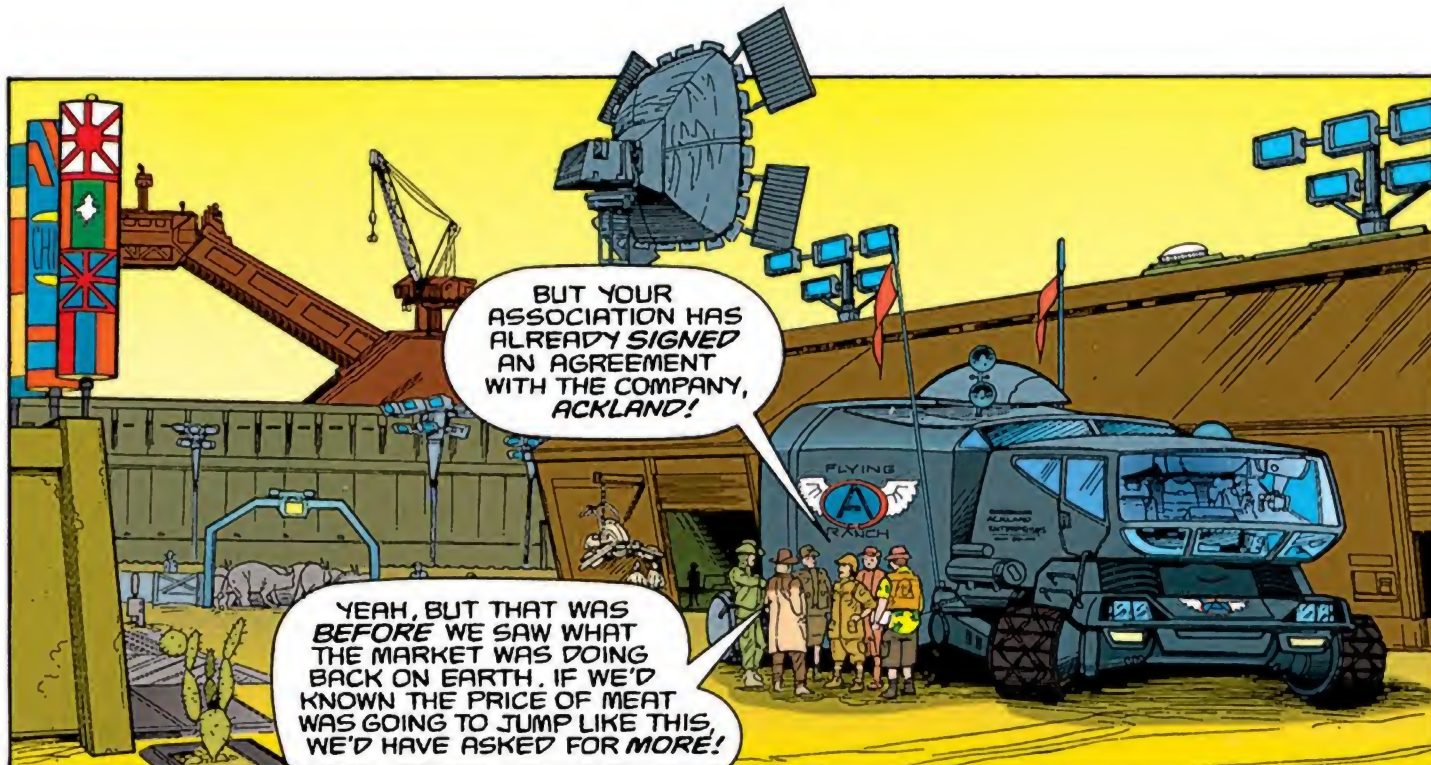
MAYBE IT WAS TIME TO
MAKE SOME OF MY OWN
MOVES...

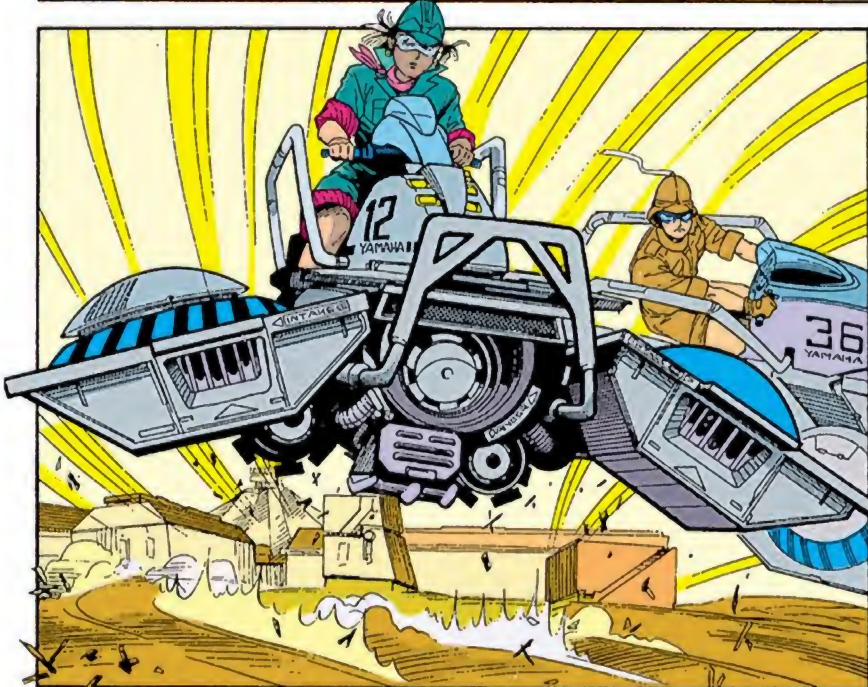


WHAT'S THE SAYING?
YOU CAN'T MAKE AN
OMELET--



--WITHOUT
BREAKING A
FEW EGGS.



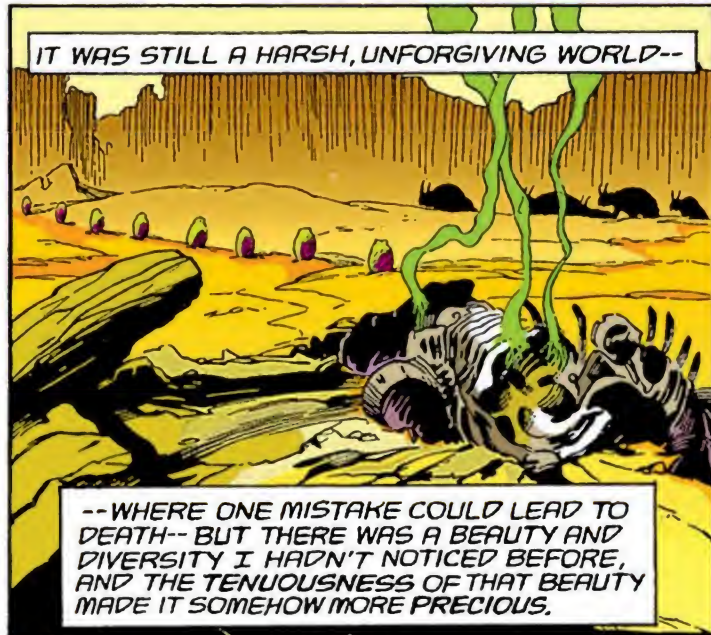


THE RIDE THAT DAY WAS THE LONGEST I'D SPENT OUTDOORS SINCE ARRIVING ON RYUSHI. I'D ALWAYS THOUGHT OF THE PLANET AS NOTHING MORE THAN DESERT-- ONE SQUARE METER OF IT LOOKING JUST LIKE ANY OTHER SQUARE METER.

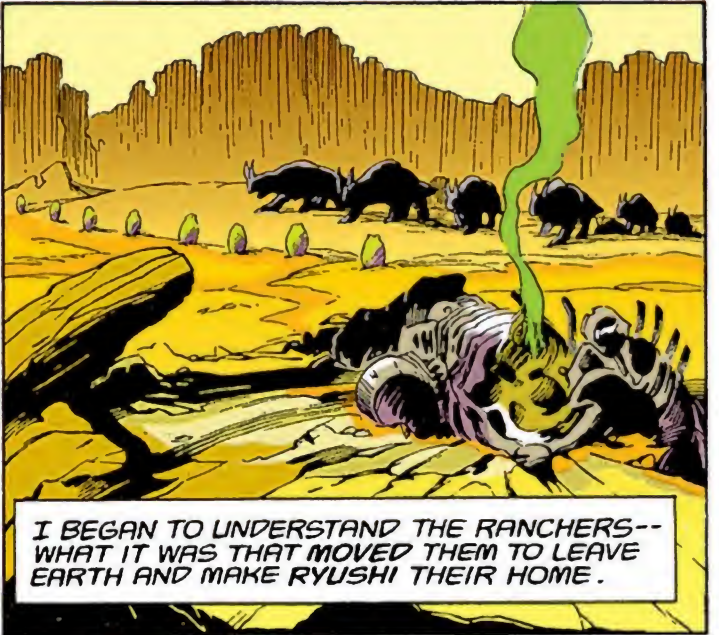


NOW, THANKS TO HIROKI, I WAS BEGINNING TO SEE RYUSHI IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT.

IT WAS STILL A HARSH, UNFORGIVING WORLD--



--WHERE ONE MISTAKE COULD LEAD TO DEATH-- BUT THERE WAS A BEAUTY AND DIVERSITY I HADN'T NOTICED BEFORE, AND THE TENUOUSNESS OF THAT BEAUTY MADE IT SOMEHOW MORE PRECIOUS.



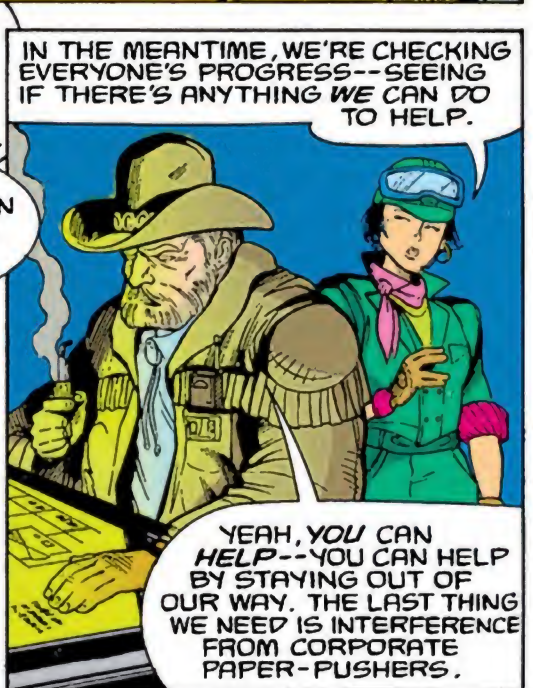
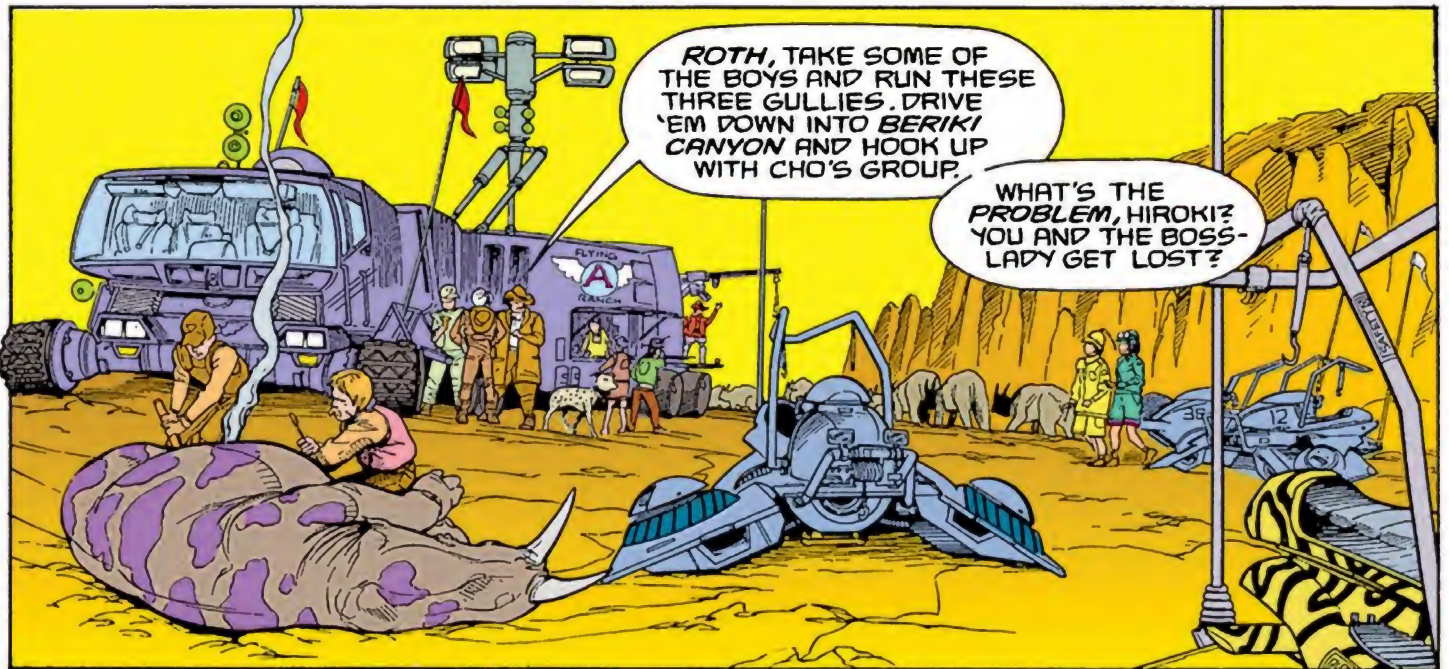
I BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THE RANCHERS-- WHAT IT WAS THAT MOVED THEM TO LEAVE EARTH AND MAKE RYUSHI THEIR HOME.

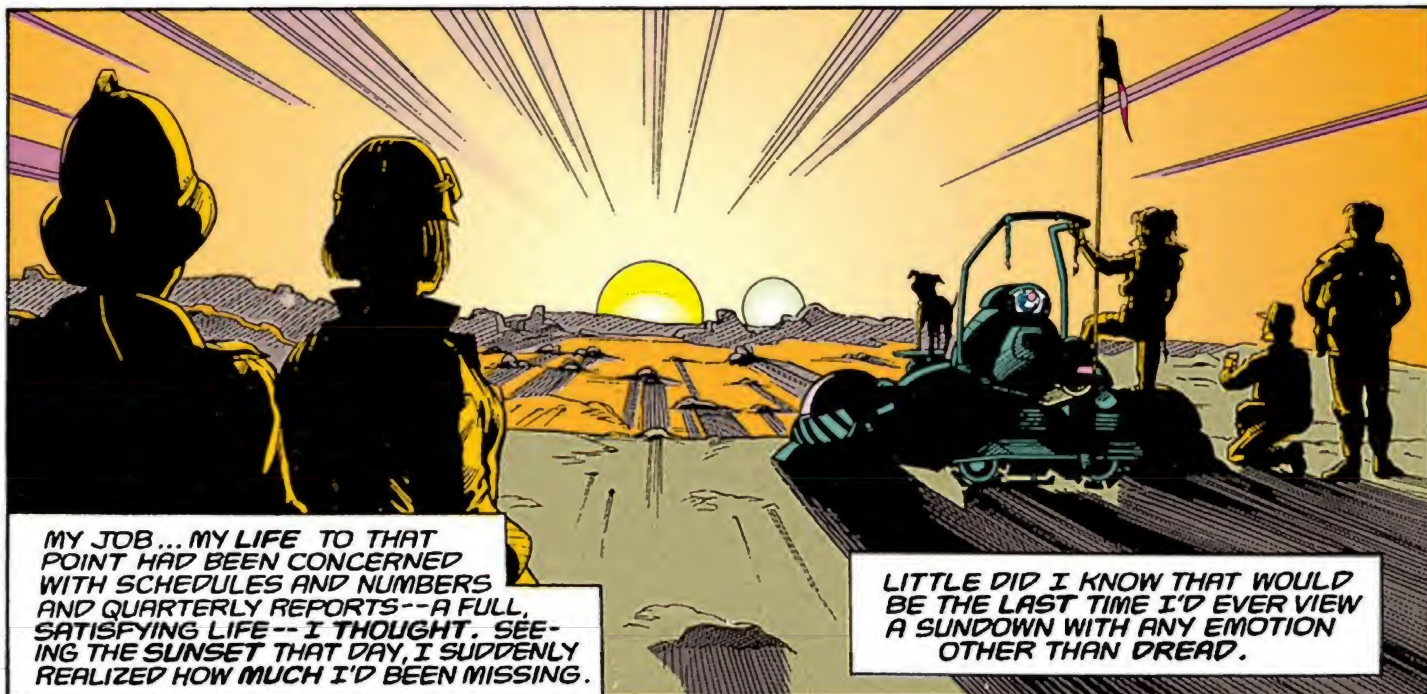


UNFORTUNATELY, IT WAS TOO LATE FOR THIS NEW UNDERSTANDING TO CHANGE MY STANDING WITH THE RANCHERS.



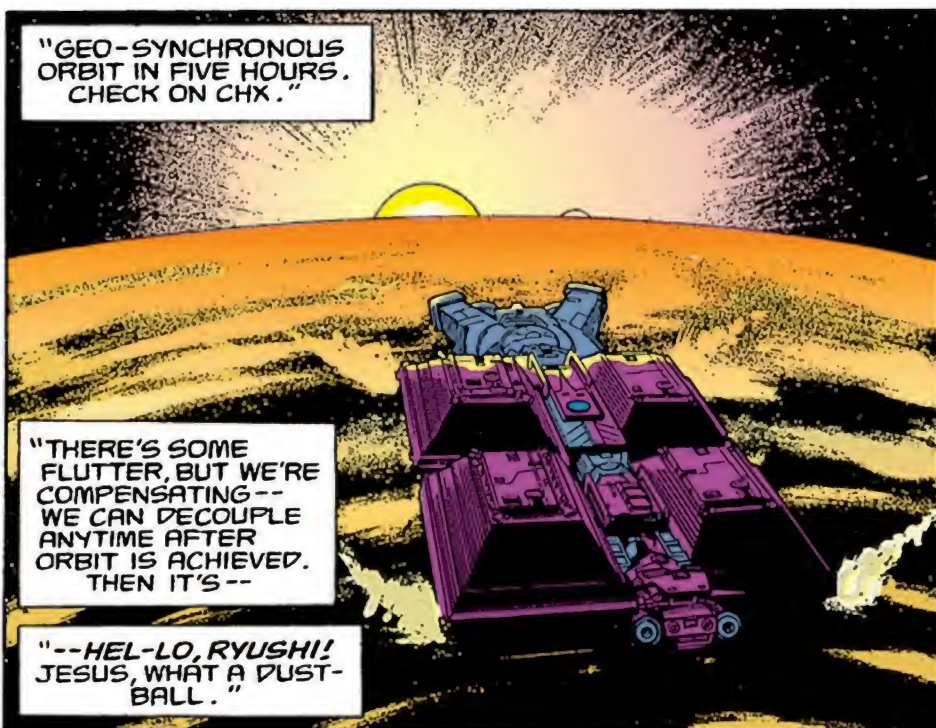
I COULDN'T BLAME THEM, THOUGH. I'D BEEN JUMPING DOWN THEIR THROATS SINCE DAY ONE.





MY JOB... MY LIFE TO THAT POINT HAD BEEN CONCERNED WITH SCHEDULES AND NUMBERS AND QUARTERLY REPORTS-- A FULL, SATISFYING LIFE-- I THOUGHT. SEEING THE SUNSET THAT DAY, I SUDDENLY REALIZED HOW MUCH I'D BEEN MISSING.

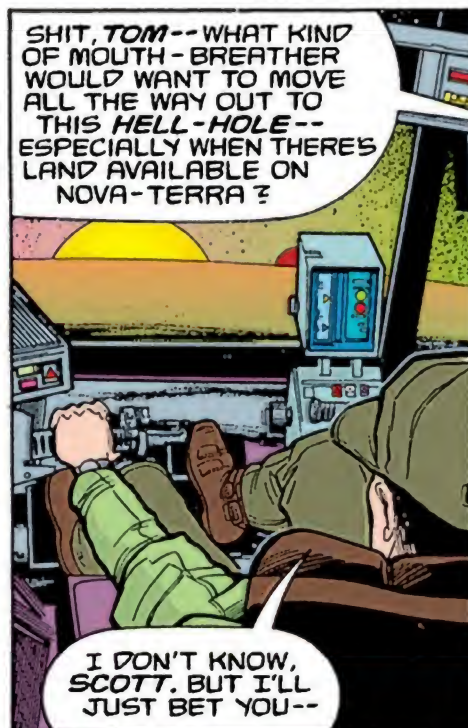
LITTLE DID I KNOW THAT WOULD BE THE LAST TIME I'D EVER VIEW A SUNDOWN WITH ANY EMOTION OTHER THAN DREAD.



"GEO-SYNCHRONOUS ORBIT IN FIVE HOURS. CHECK ON CHX."

"THERE'S SOME FLUTTER, BUT WE'RE COMPENSATING-- WE CAN DECOUPLE ANYTIME AFTER ORBIT IS ACHIEVED. THEN IT'S--"

"--HEL-LO, RYUSHI! JESUS, WHAT A DUST-BALL."



SHIT, TOM-- WHAT KIND OF MOUTH-BREATHER WOULD WANT TO MOVE ALL THE WAY OUT TO THIS HELL-HOLE-- ESPECIALLY WHEN THERE'S LAND AVAILABLE ON NOVA-TERRA?

I DON'T KNOW, SCOTT. BUT I'LL JUST BET YOU--



"--RYUSHI IS SOMEBODY'S IDEA OF PARADISE."



HERE SHE COMES!
NOW IT'S REALLY
GONNA HIT THE
FAN ...



THIS MESSAGE
JUST ARRIVED
FOR YOU, MS.
NOGUCHI--

IT'S FROM
THE SHUTTLE
MASUKO-
MARU--



"E.T.A. SEVEN STANDARD
EARTH DAYS...*SHIGERU
CHIGUSA* ON BOARD--
COMING TO INSPECT THE
OPERATION *PERSONALLY*..."?

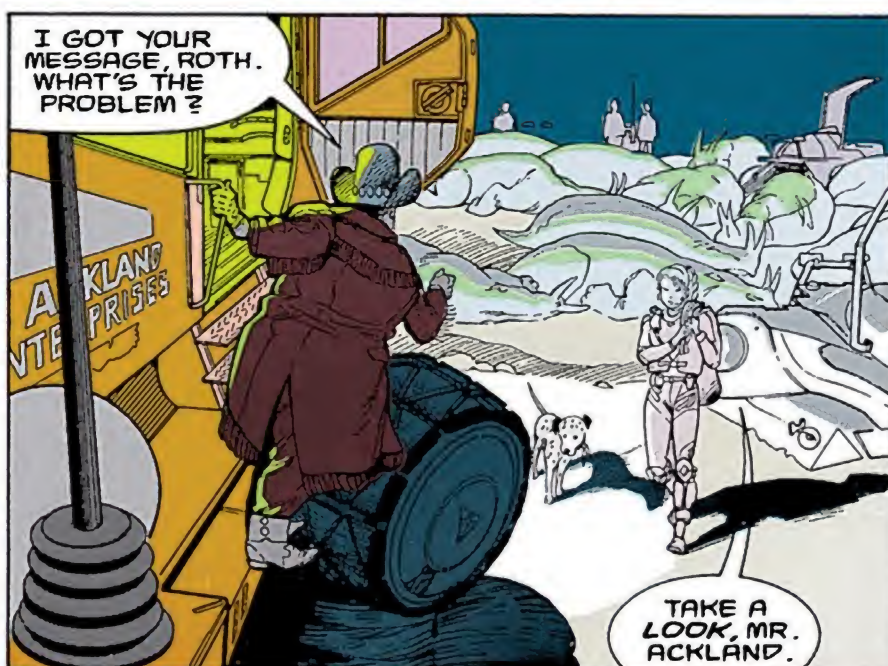
MR.
CHIGUSA'S
SON...
COMING
HERE...
?

THEY SAY THAT TROUBLE
COMES IN THREES--



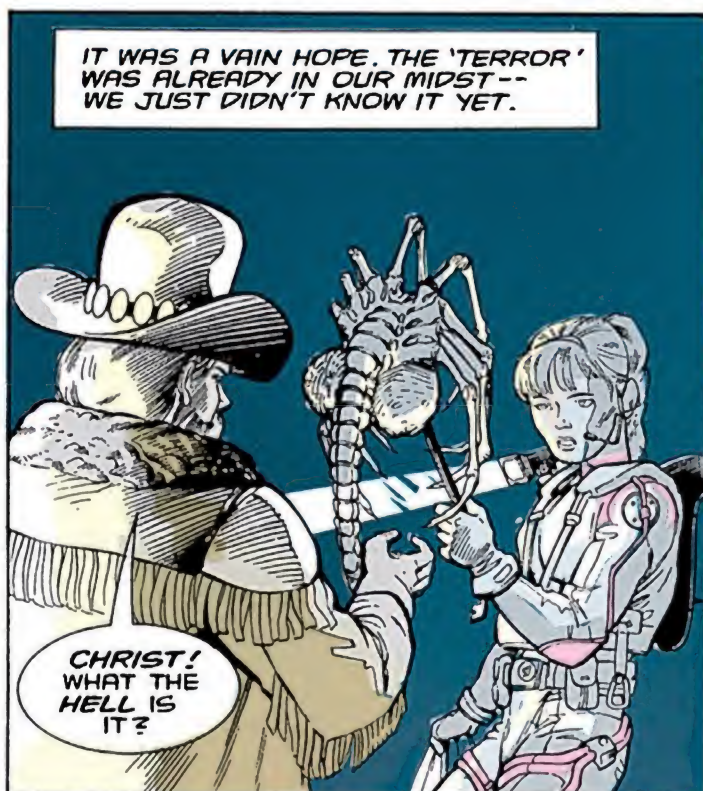
SCREECH

WE HAD A LONG NIGHT AHEAD
OF US. I HOPED THE NEXT
TWO DISASTERS WOULD AT
LEAST WAIT UNTIL MORNING.



I GOT YOUR
MESSAGE, ROTH.
WHAT'S THE
PROBLEM?

TAKE A
LOOK, MR.
ACKLAND.



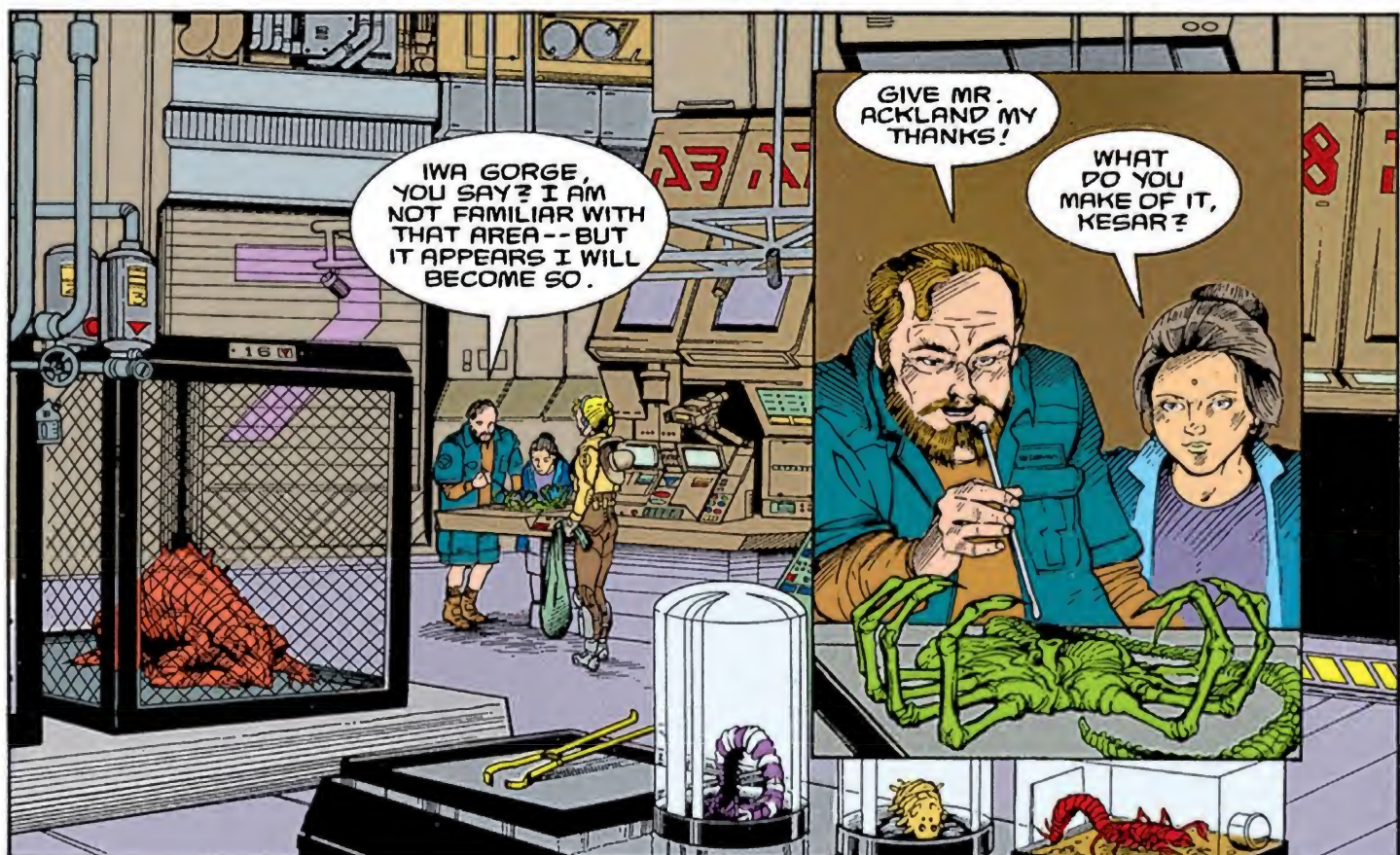
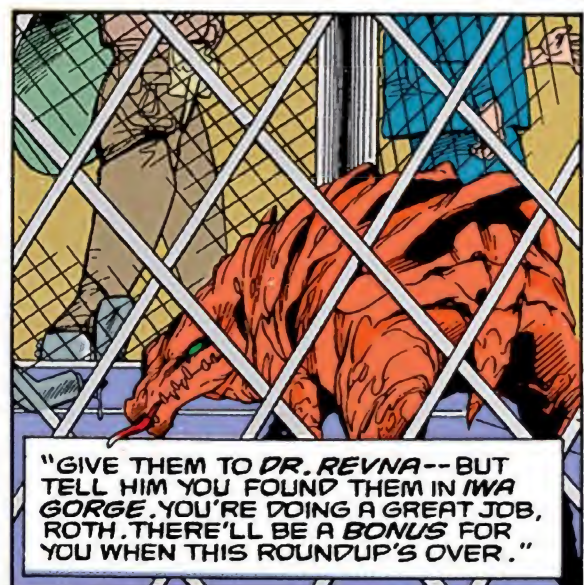
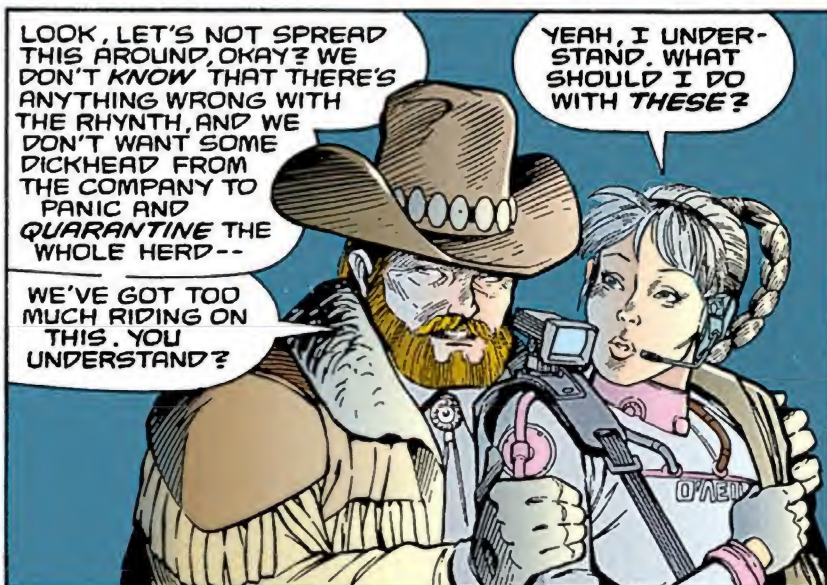
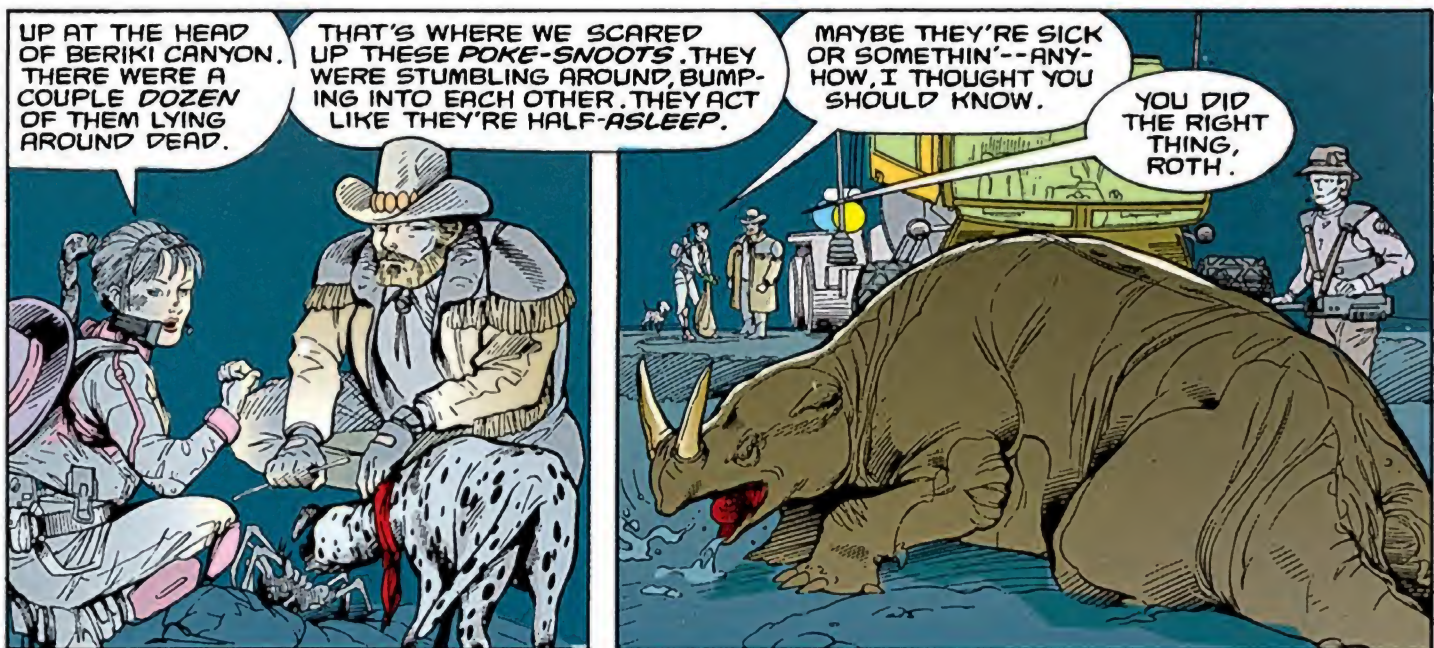
IT WAS A VAIN HOPE. THE 'TERROR'
WAS ALREADY IN OUR MIDST--
WE JUST DIDN'T KNOW IT YET.

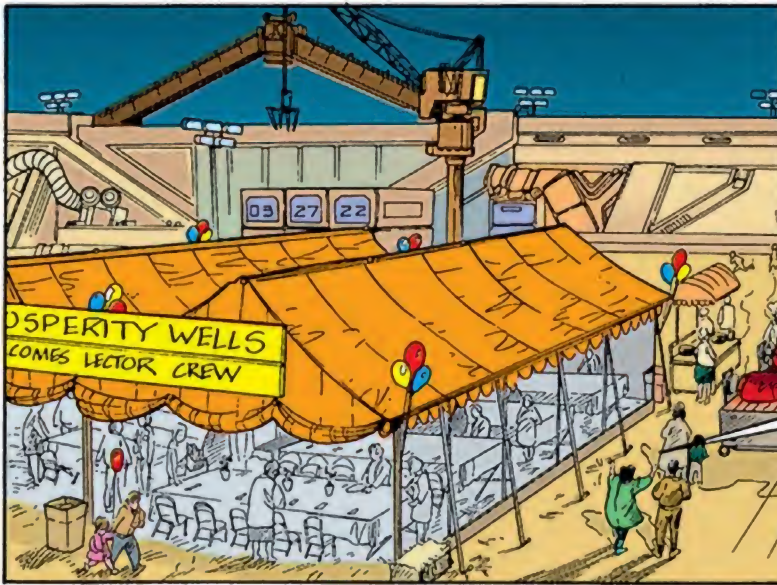
CHRIST!
WHAT THE
HELL IS
IT?



BESIDES UGLIER THAN
SHIT? I WAS HOPING
YOU COULD TELL ME.

I'VE NEVER SEEN
ANYTHING LIKE
THESE THINGS. WHERE'D
YOU FIND THEM?





I BEAMED A MESSAGE TO THE HOME OFFICE EXPRESSING MY PLEASURE AT THE NEWS OF SHIGERU CHIGUSA'S VISIT AND MY REQUEST FOR A BETTER PRICE FOR THE RANCHERS-- SUPPORTING IT WITH A NEW, STEPPED-UP SCHEDULE FOR THE HARVEST. THEN I GRABBED SIX HOURS OF SLEEP BEFORE GOING OUT TO MAKE SURE WE COULD KEEP MY PROMISE.

I TOLD YOU-- YOU CAN'T RUN PEOPLE LIKE MACHINES. YOU THINK THE PAST THREE YEARS ON THIS ROCK HAVE BEEN EASY FOR THESE FOLKS? THIS IS THEIR FIRST ROUNDUP-- EVERYTHING THEY'VE BEEN WORKING FOR!

IF THEY WANT TO CELEBRATE THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENT, LET THEM! OTHERWISE, SHIGERU CHIGUSA WILL ARRIVE JUST IN TIME TO WITNESS A FULL-SCALE REVOLT!

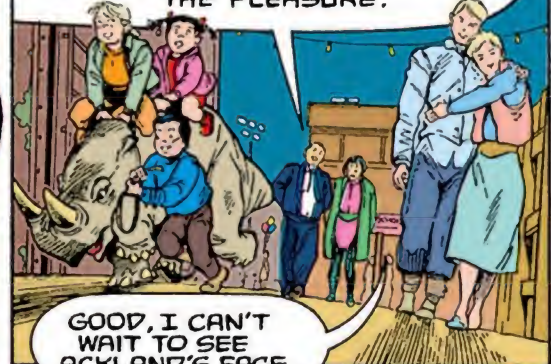


YOU'RE RIGHT-- AGAIN, HIROKI.

COME ON, LET'S GO GREET THE SHIP-- IT'S DUE ANY MINUTE.

IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO GET CAUGHT UP IN THE EXCITEMENT OF THE MOMENT. CHILDREN WERE LAUGHING... HUSBANDS AND WIVES WERE ACTING LIKE YOUNG LOVERS... SOMEONE FED MUSIC OVER THE PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM.

OH, THE HOME OFFICE CALLED-- THEY APPROVED THE PRICE HIKE FOR THE RANCHERS. I HAVEN'T TOLD ANYONE-- I FIGURED YOU'D WANT THE PLEASURE.



GOOD, I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE ACKLAND'S FACE.



UP HERE. THE ANTENNA TOWER IS THE ONLY PLACE TO WATCH A LANDING.

CAN IT SUPPORT BOTH OF US?

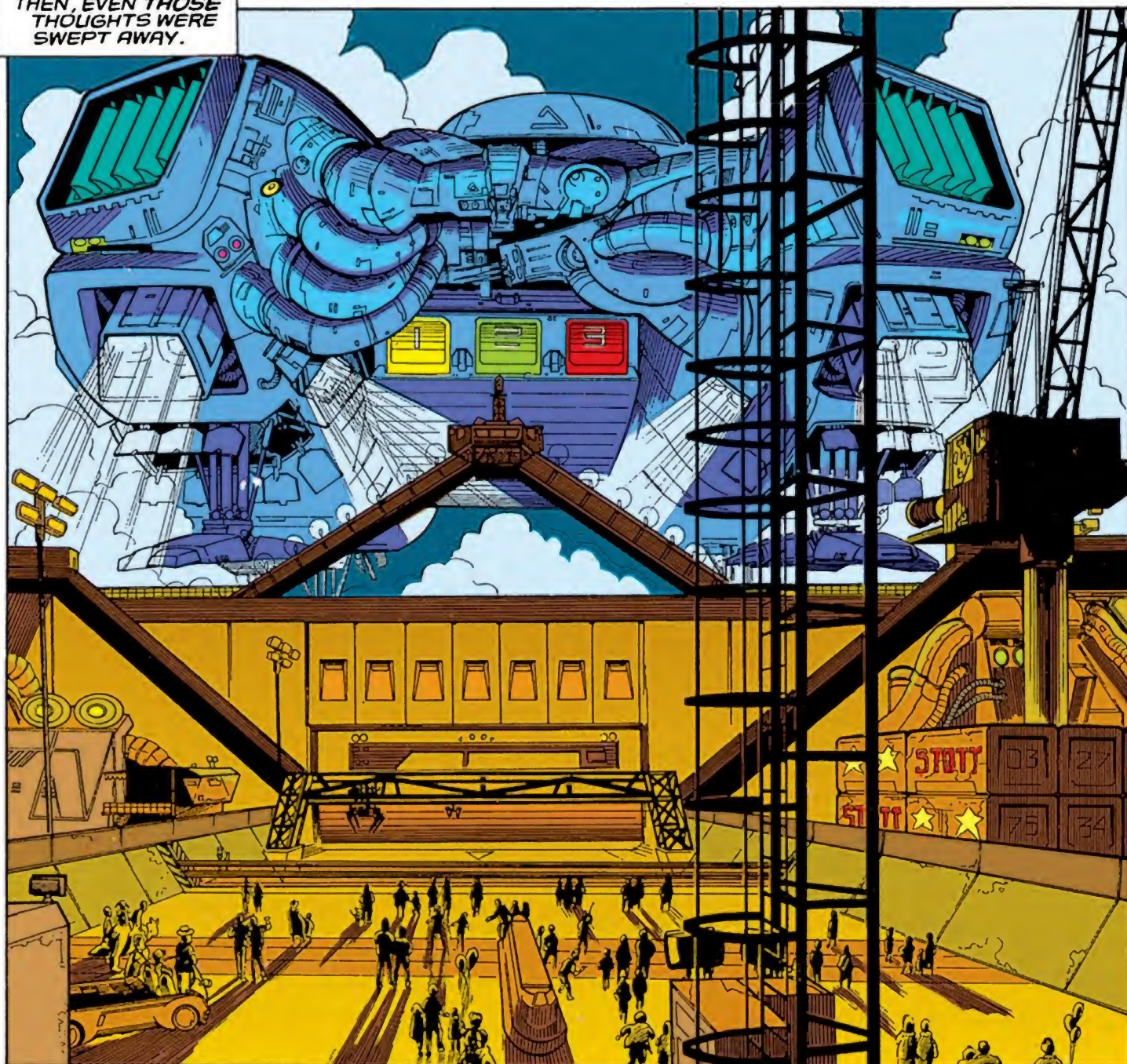
LET'S FIND OUT.

FOR A MOMENT I WAS ABLE TO FORGET MY JOB--



--FORGET EVERYTHING BUT PLEASANT MEMORIES... OF MYSELF AS A LITTLE GIRL... OF OBON FESTIVALS WITH MY PARENTS...

THEN, EVEN THOSE
THOUGHTS WERE
SWEEPED AWAY.

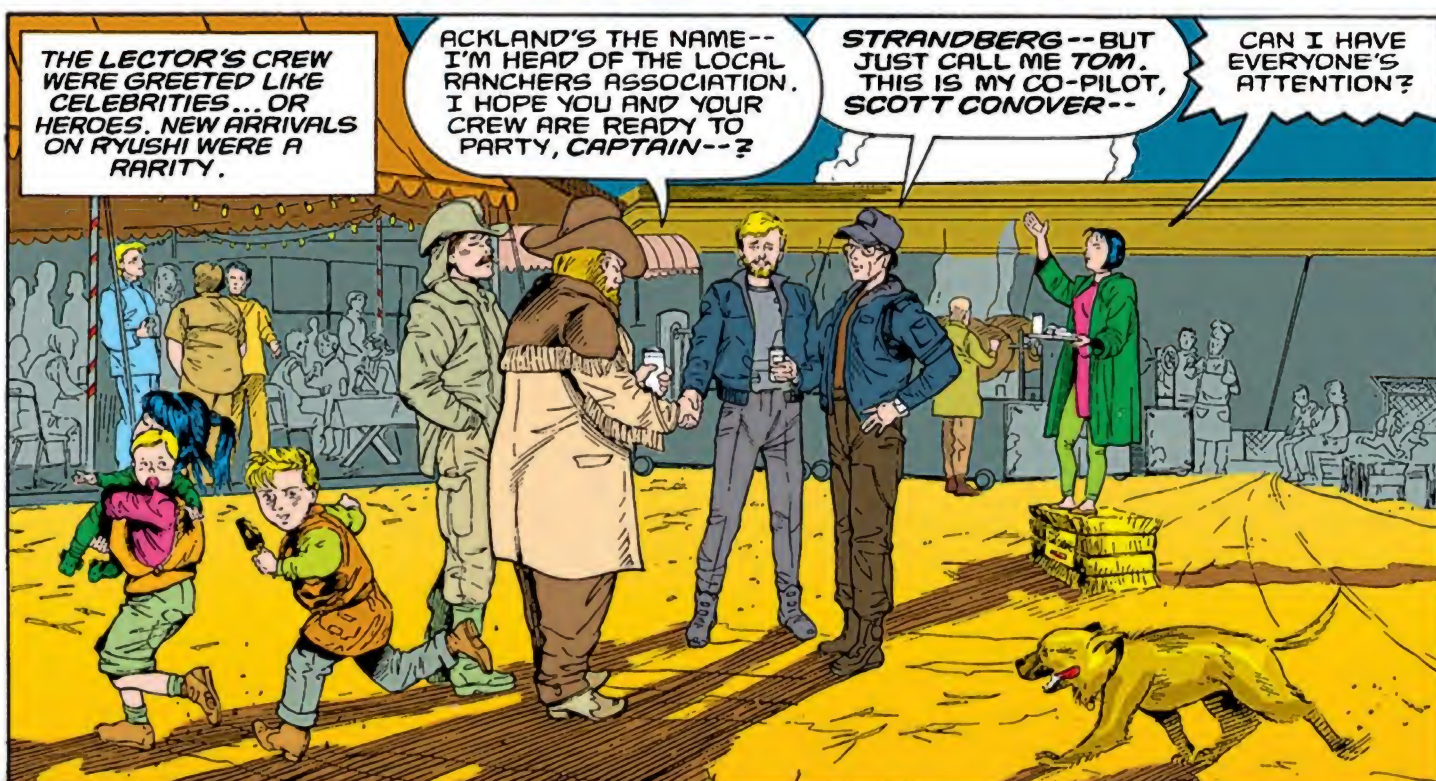


THE LECTOR'S CREW
WERE GREETED LIKE
CELEBRITIES... OR
HEROES. NEW ARRIVALS
ON RYUSHI WERE A
RARITY.

ACKLAND'S THE NAME--
I'M HEAD OF THE LOCAL
RANCHERS ASSOCIATION.
I HOPE YOU AND YOUR
CREW ARE READY TO
PARTY, CAPTAIN--?

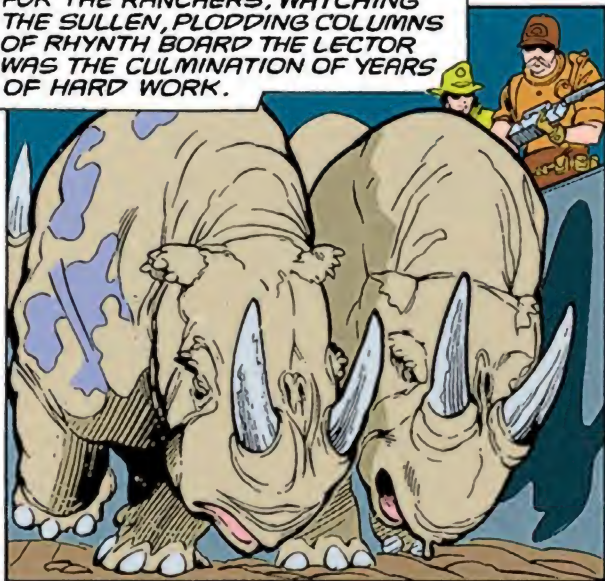
STRANDBERG-- BUT
JUST CALL ME TOM.
THIS IS MY CO-PILOT,
SCOTT CONOVER--

CAN I HAVE
EVERYONE'S
ATTENTION?

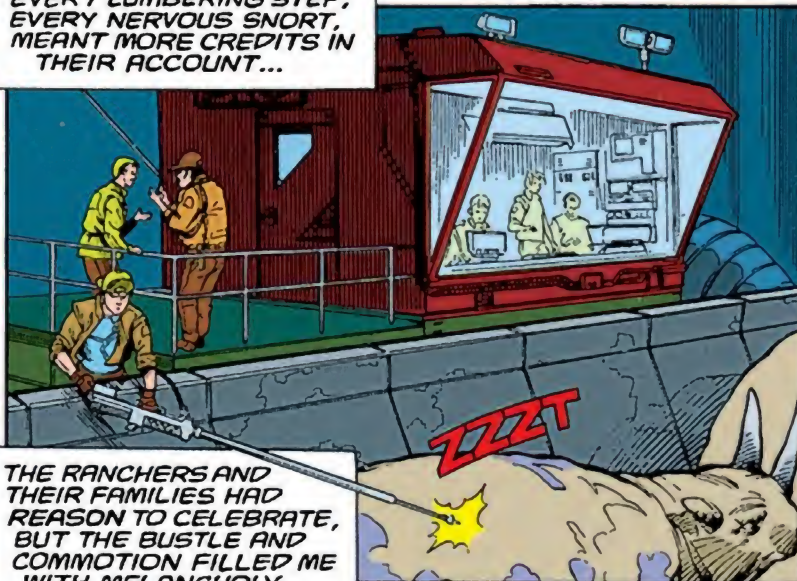




FOR THE RANCHERS, WATCHING THE SULLEN, PLODDING COLUMNS OF RHYNTH BOARD THE LECTOR WAS THE CULMINATION OF YEARS OF HARD WORK.

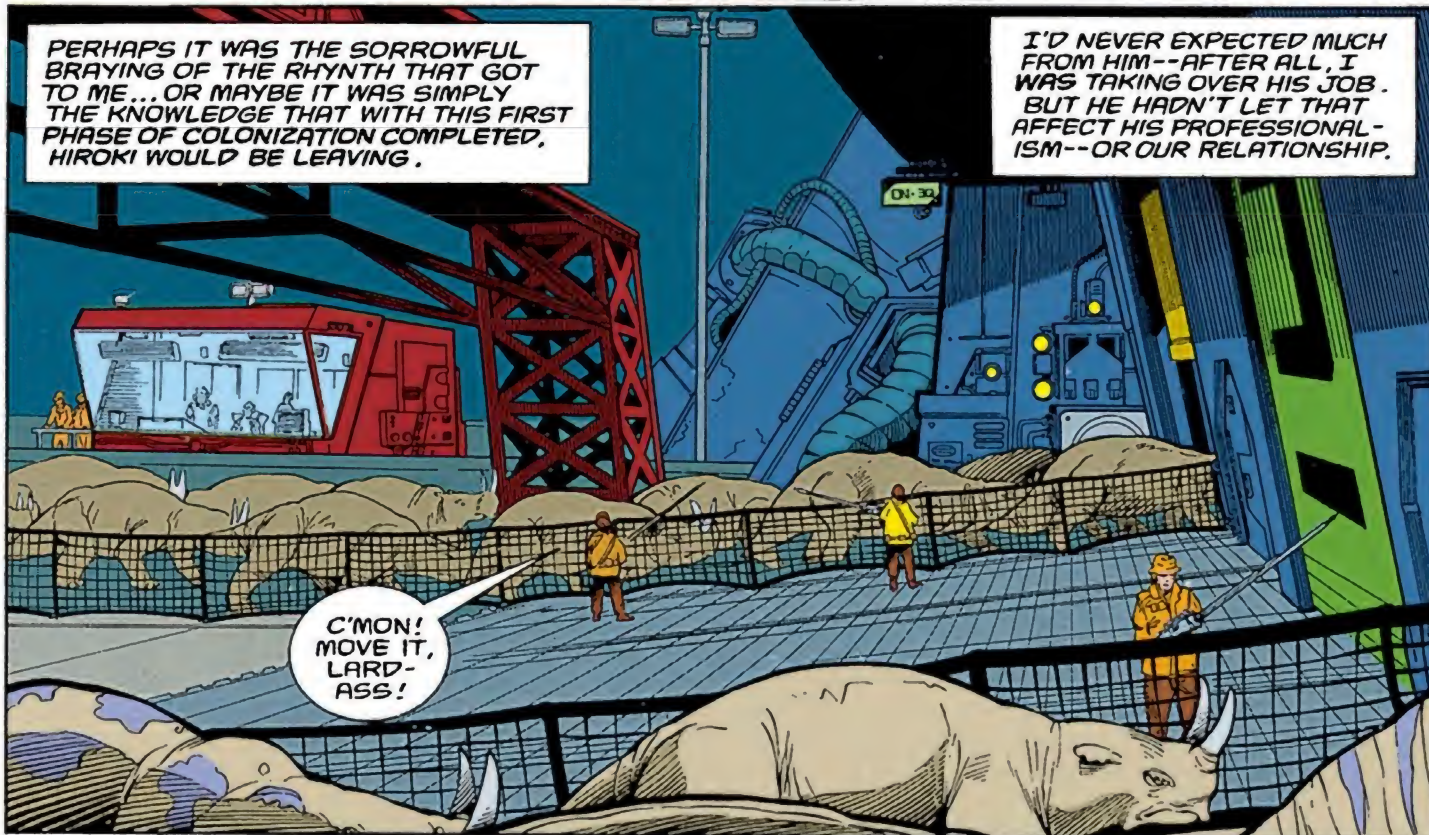


EVERY LUMBERING STEP, EVERY NERVOUS SNORT, MEANT MORE CREDITS IN THEIR ACCOUNT...



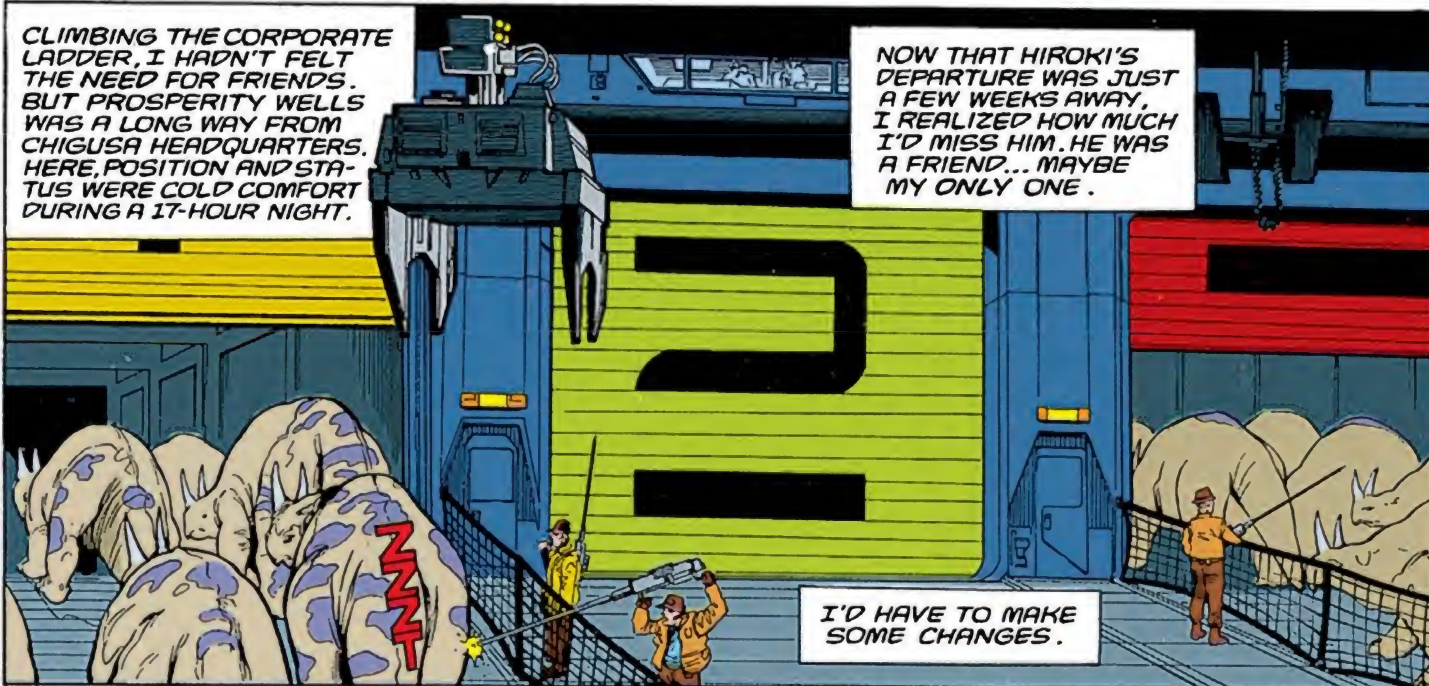
THE RANCHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES HAD REASON TO CELEBRATE, BUT THE BUSTLE AND COMMOTION FILLED ME WITH MELANCHOLY.

PERHAPS IT WAS THE SORROWFUL BRAYING OF THE RHYNTH THAT GOT TO ME... OR MAYBE IT WAS SIMPLY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WITH THIS FIRST PHASE OF COLONIZATION COMPLETED, HIROKI WOULD BE LEAVING.



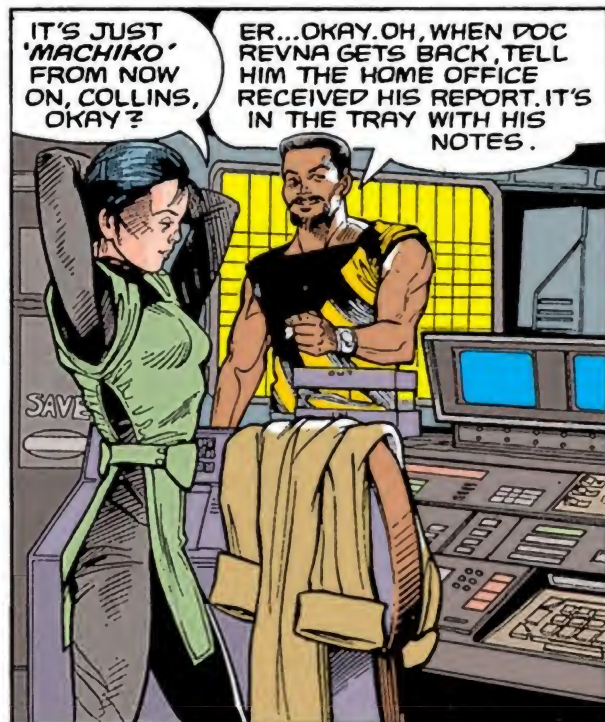
I'D NEVER EXPECTED MUCH FROM HIM--AFTER ALL, I WAS TAKING OVER HIS JOB. BUT HE HADN'T LET THAT AFFECT HIS PROFESSIONALISM--OR OUR RELATIONSHIP.

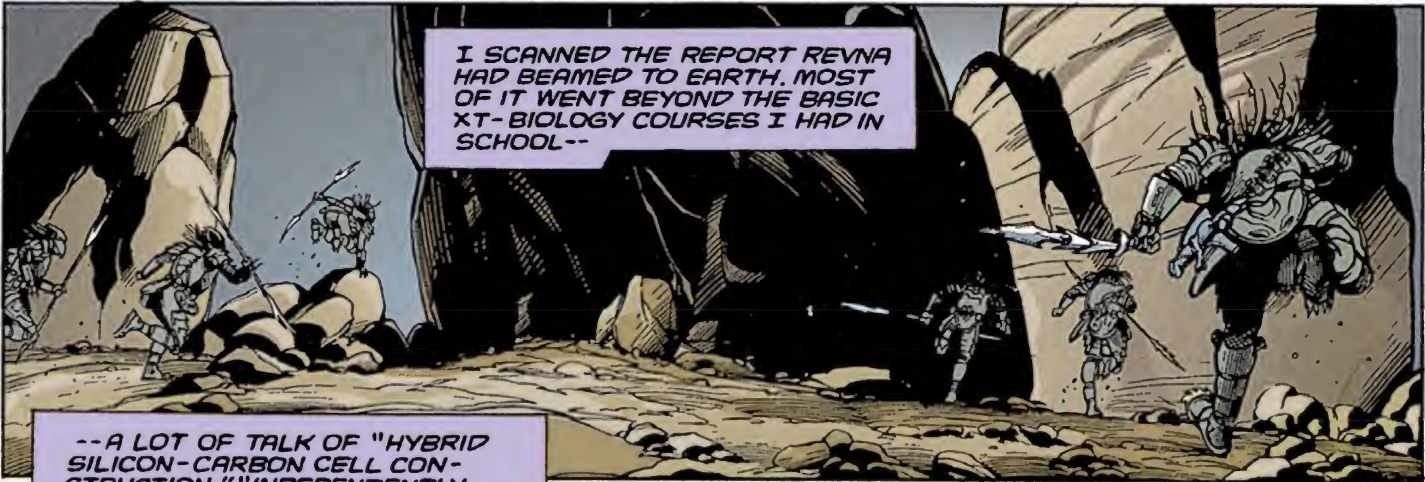
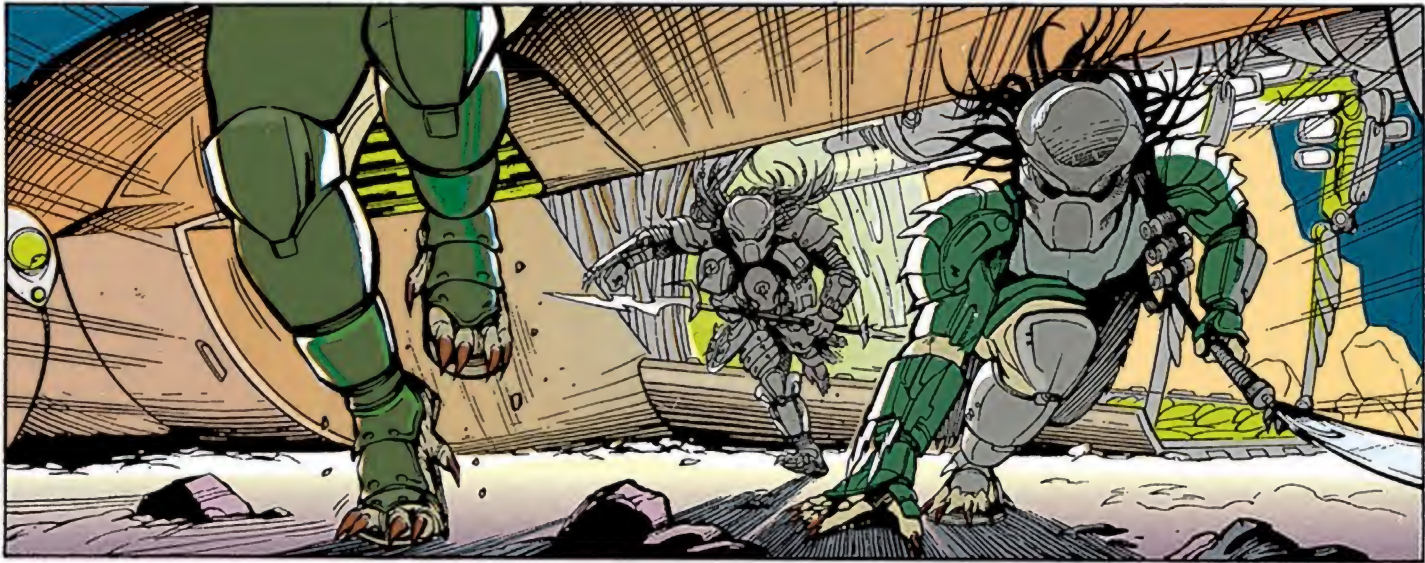
CLIMBING THE CORPORATE LADDER, I HADN'T FELT THE NEED FOR FRIENDS. BUT PROSPERITY WELLS WAS A LONG WAY FROM CHIGUSA HEADQUARTERS. HERE, POSITION AND STATUS WERE COLD COMFORT DURING A 17-HOUR NIGHT.



NOW THAT HIROKI'S DEPARTURE WAS JUST A FEW WEEKS AWAY, I REALIZED HOW MUCH I'D MISS HIM. HE WAS A FRIEND... MAYBE MY ONLY ONE.

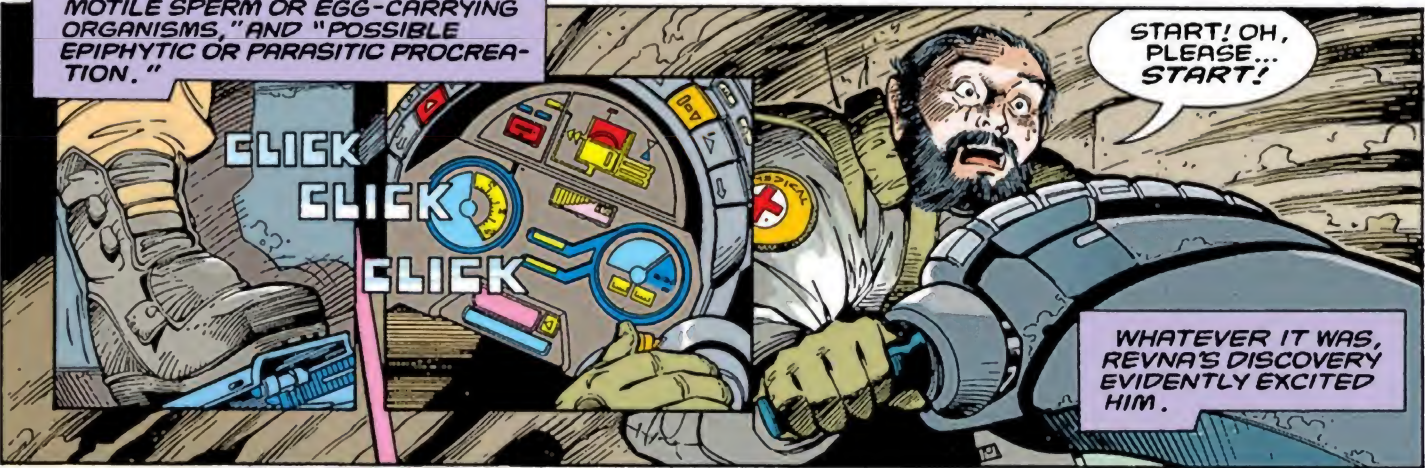
I'D HAVE TO MAKE SOME CHANGES.





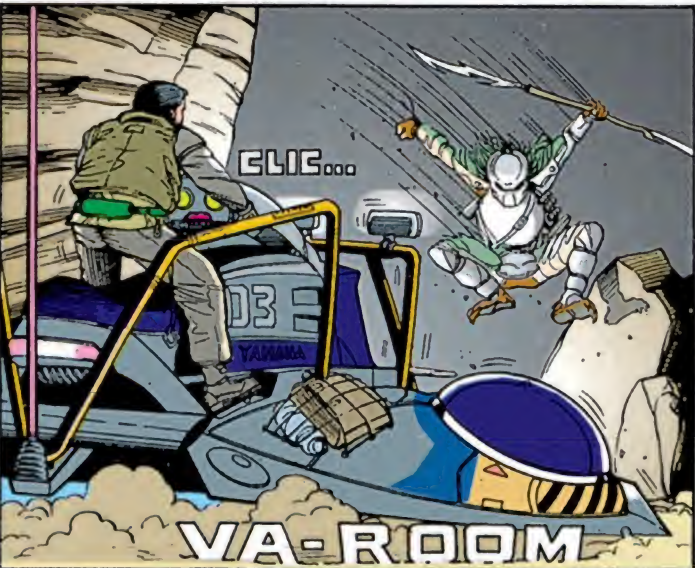
I SCANNED THE REPORT REVNA HAD BEAMED TO EARTH. MOST OF IT WENT BEYOND THE BASIC XT-BIOLOGY COURSES I HAD IN SCHOOL--

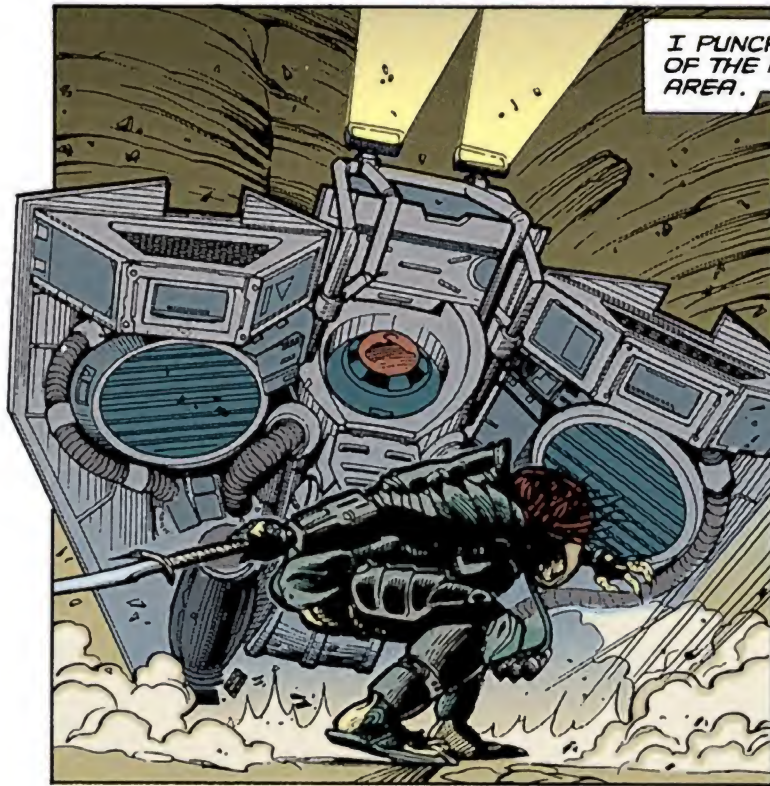
-- A LOT OF TALK OF "HYBRID SILICON-CARBON CELL CONSTRUCTION," "INDEPENDENTLY MOTILE SPERM OR EGG-CARRYING ORGANISMS," AND "POSSIBLE EPIPHYTIC OR PARASITIC PROCREATION."



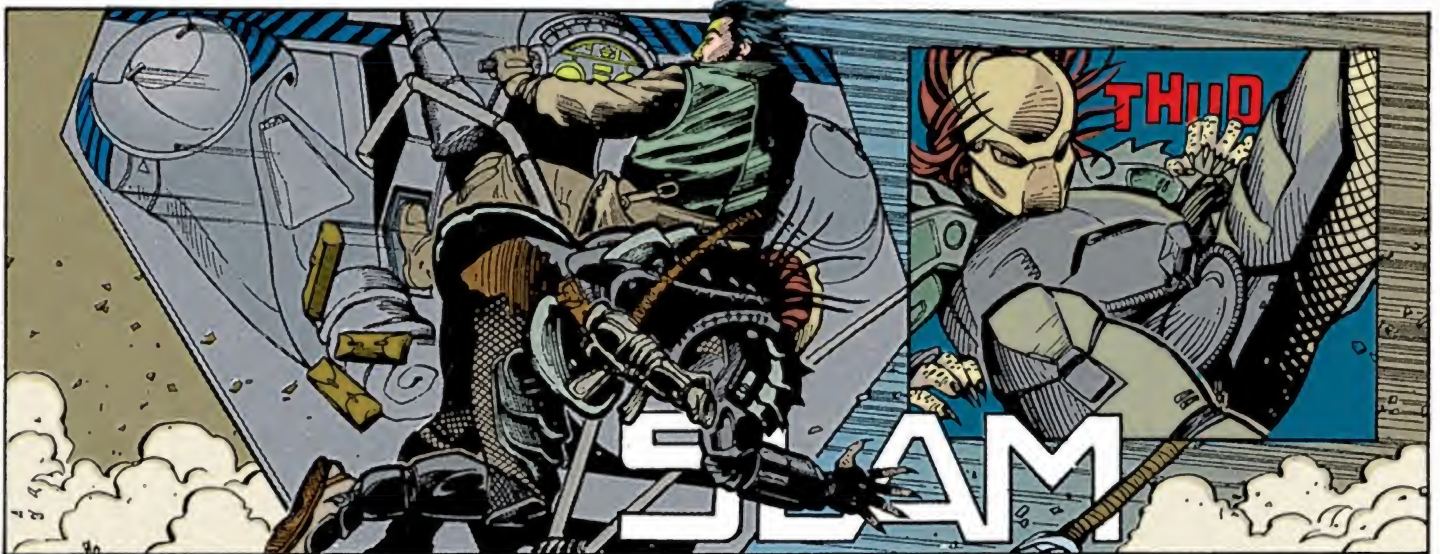
START! OH, PLEASE... START!

WHATEVER IT WAS, REVNA'S DISCOVERY EVIDENTLY EXCITED HIM.

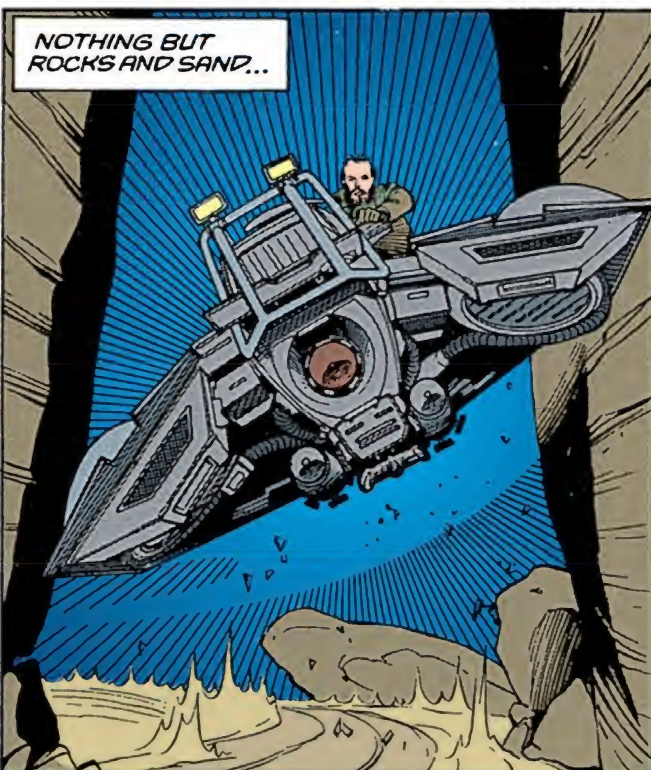




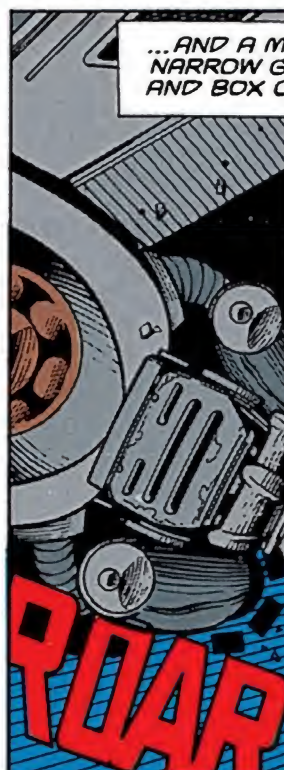
I PUNCHED UP A MAP
OF THE IWA GORGE
AREA.



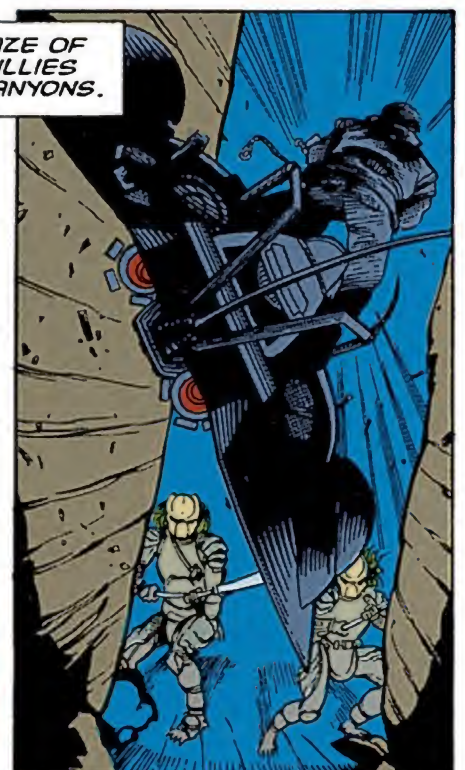
SLAM

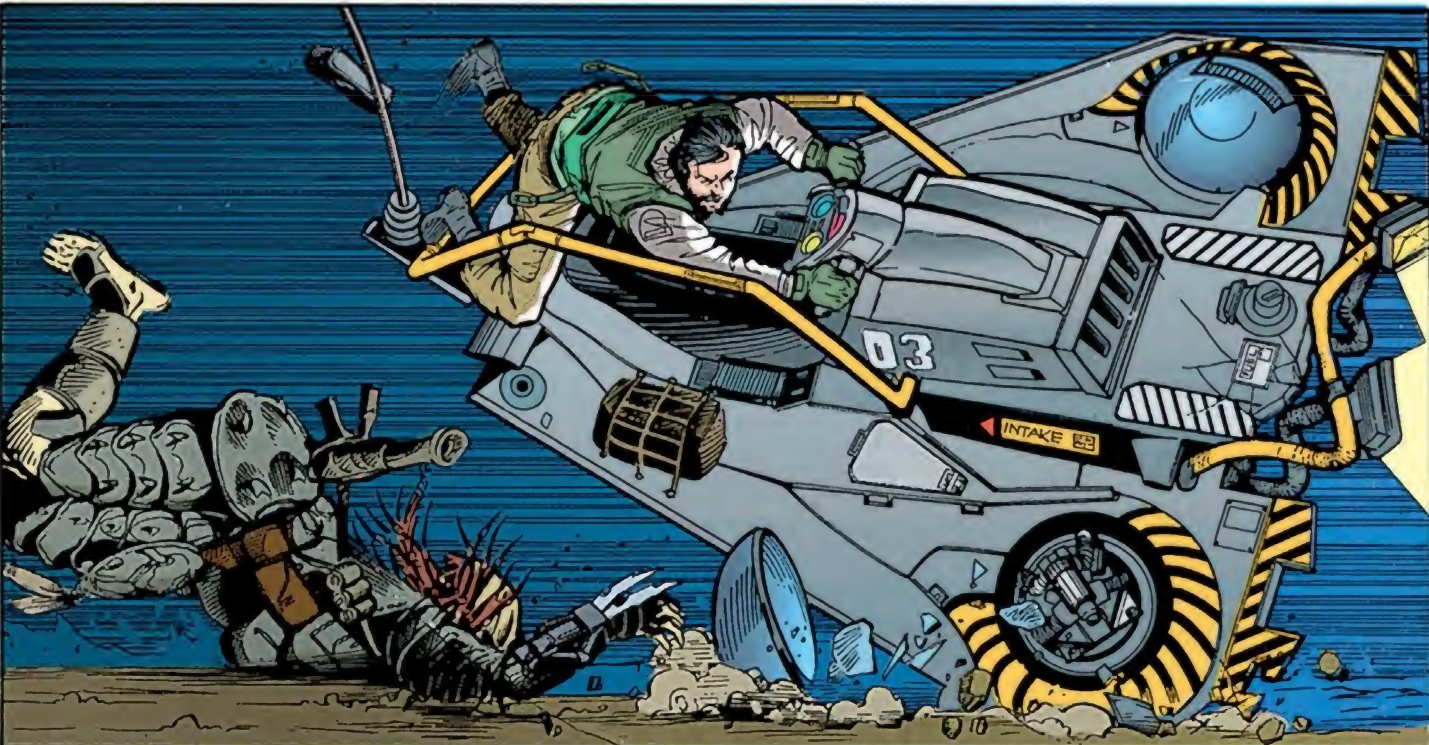
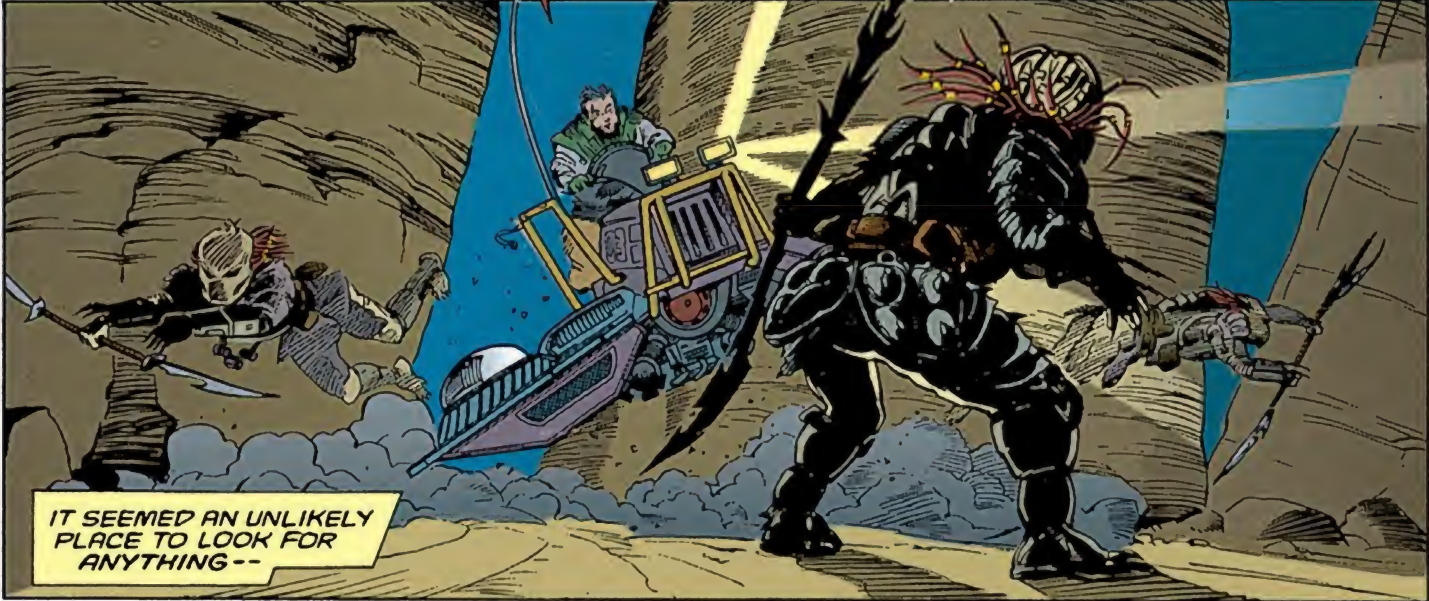


NOTHING BUT
ROCKS AND SAND...



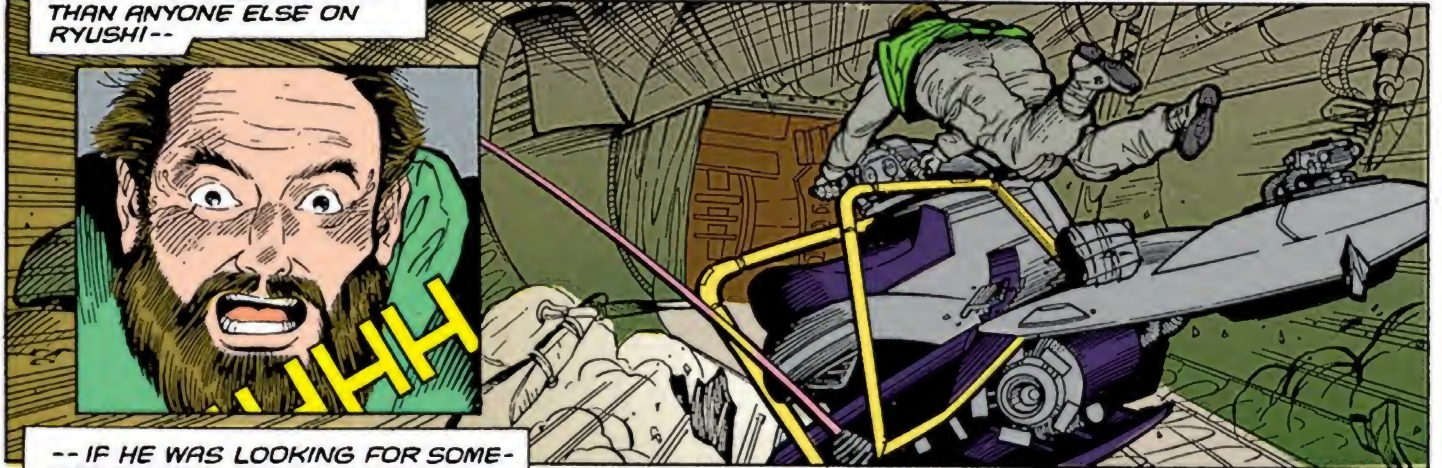
...AND A MAZE OF
NARROW GULLIES
AND BOX CANYONS.



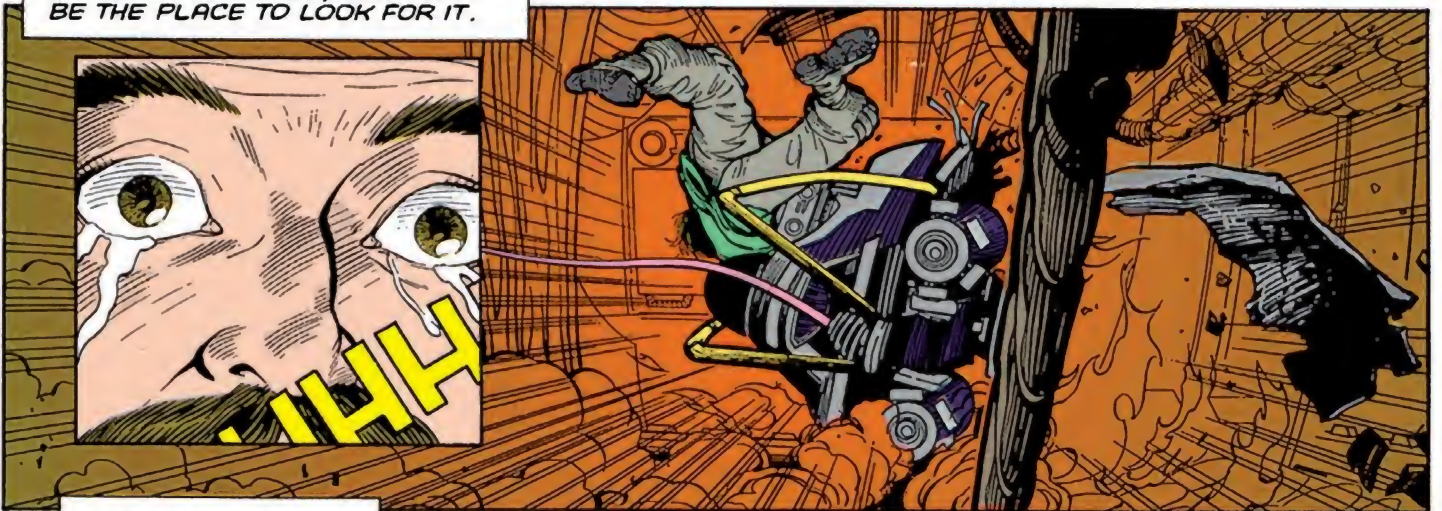




BUT REVNA WAS A SMART
MAN--PROBABLY SMARTER
THAN ANYONE ELSE ON
RYUSHI--



-- IF HE WAS LOOKING FOR SOME-
THING IN IWA GORGE, THAT MUST
BE THE PLACE TO LOOK FOR IT.

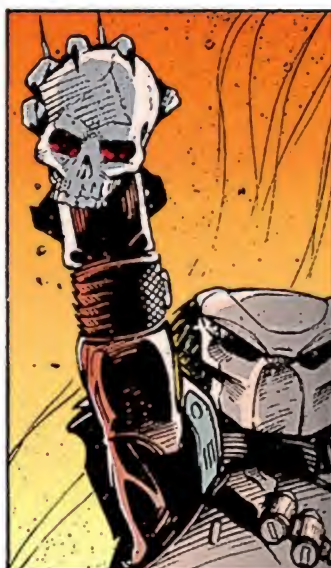
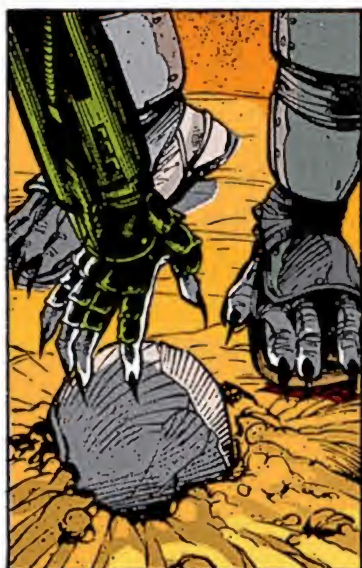


I LIKED THE DOC--



-- I HOPED HE WOULD
FIND WHAT HE WAS
LOOKING FOR.





The disparity in ratio between the smooth-backed specimens and the single carcass with dorsal spines notwithstanding, I believe the differences between the two types represent --



-- sexual indicators—not of the specimens themselves—but of the zygote or "egg" that each carries. As stated above, none of the specimens is equipped for independent life --



-- their sole purpose seems to be nothing more than that of a living delivery vehicle—an "ambulatory penis," if you will. While it is risky to postulate too much from such a tiny sam-



"AMBULATORY PENIS," HUH? CONJURES UP QUITE AN IMAGE, DOESN'T IT?



YOU'RE DRUNK.

YEAH, BUT NOT TOO DRUNK-- IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, MS. NOGUSHI.



IT'S NOGUCHI-- BUT YOU CAN CALL ME MA'AM.

YEAH? I HEARD ABOUT WHAT A NUT-BUSTER YOU ARE. TOUGH LADY. COMPANY RAMROD.

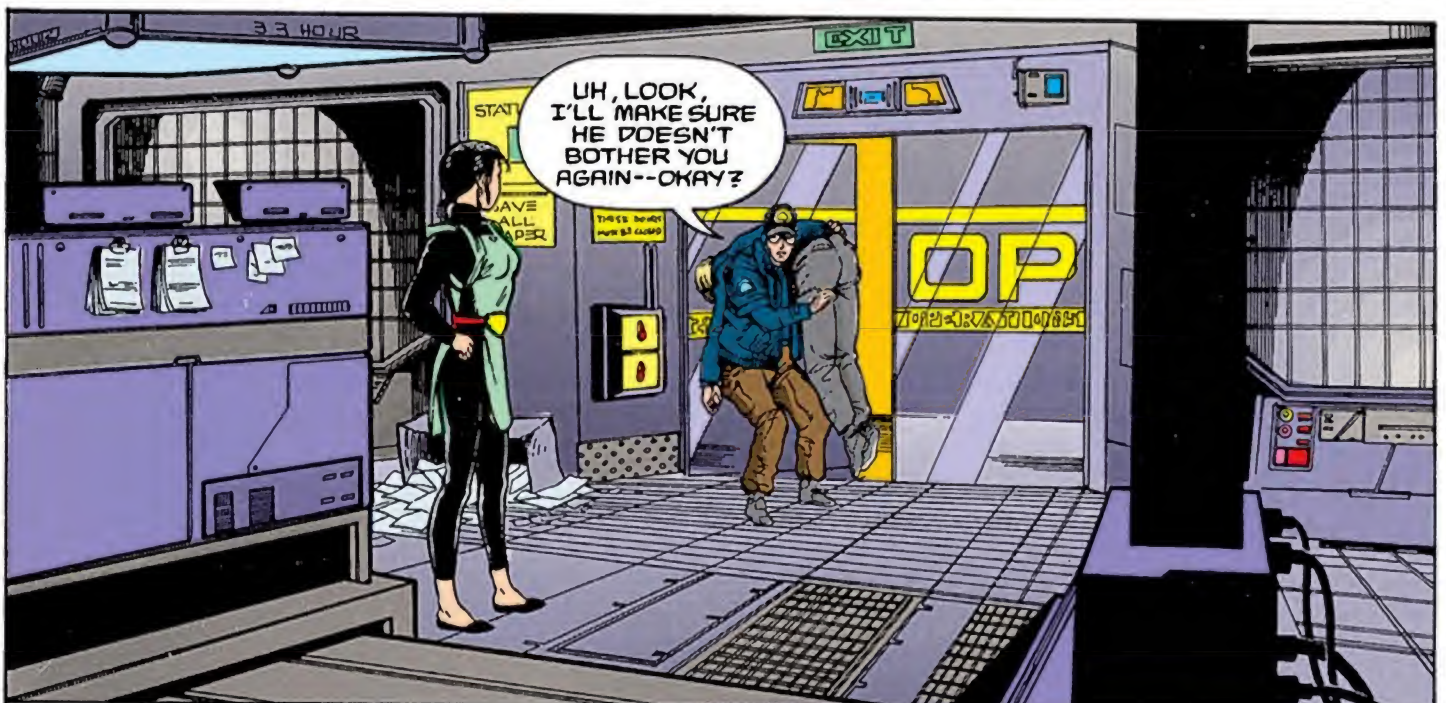
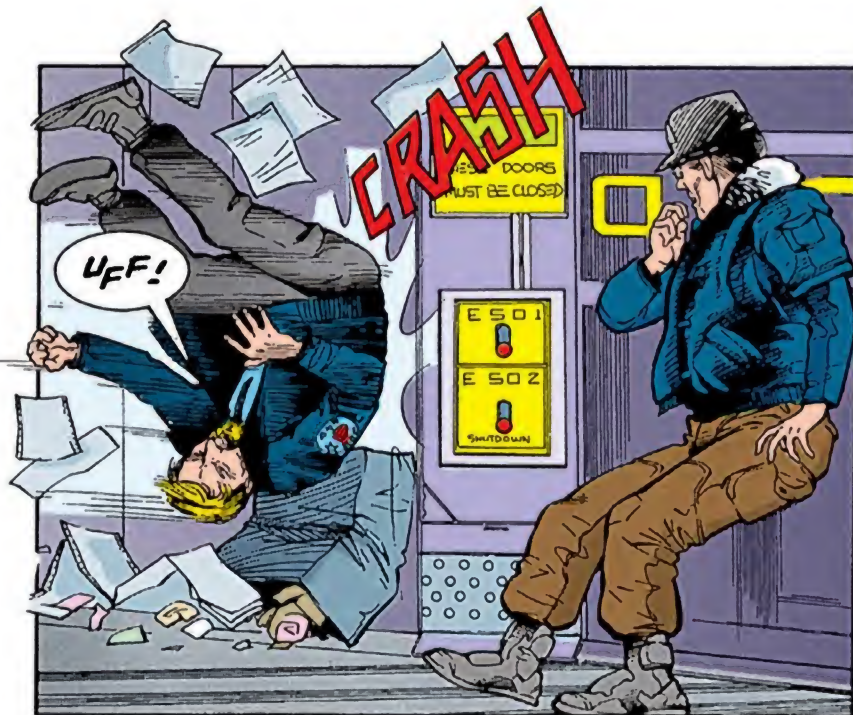


WELL, I GOT YOUR RAMROD-- RIGHT HERE.



SCOTT?

AAHH



CHIGUSA, INC., I.S.

a multi-stellar corporation

LEAPWAVE® TRANSMISSION (code 8825/L.02903)

TO:

Dr. Margaret Chen Ph. D., D.E.B.
Director, XT Biology Section
Chigusa Terran Corporate Headquarters
077.38.2.000.934.3153

page 1 of 8

FROM:

Dr. Kesar Revna, M.D., D.V.M.
Chigusa Colony: Prosperity Wells
Ryushi (L: 528, L: 1054, Q: 3/227)
077.32.7.714.224.3495

RE:

New XT life forms discovered on Ryushi (photos and x-rays accompanying)
Dr. Chen,

Several specimens of an organism of which I'm completely unfamiliar were brought to my attention this evening (Ryushi time). I checked them against my copy of Lowe's Guide (ver. 4.03a), but was unable to find a cross-reference for them.

The main problem seems to be the organisms' basic make-up. It defies the standard carbon/silicon classification by exhibiting indicators of both—though I've come across a listing of anything with hybrid silicon-carbon cell construction. As I imagine, this structure makes for an incredibly tough organism. The skin is a chitin-like material, and I had resort to a Menashe bone saw to cut through it. I note here that though the creature's blood and bodily fluids are inert, they possess properties of a neutralized molecular acid.)

The most interesting aspect of the creature, however, is its internal design. It seems to be a mouth (see figure no. 1), and the beginnings of a digestive tract (see x-ray no. 1), but no provisions for thorough digestion or excretion (see x-ray no. 2). The "stomach" function ends in a single muscular sac (x-ray no. 2). The question remains—unless it is not a stomach—in which case the question

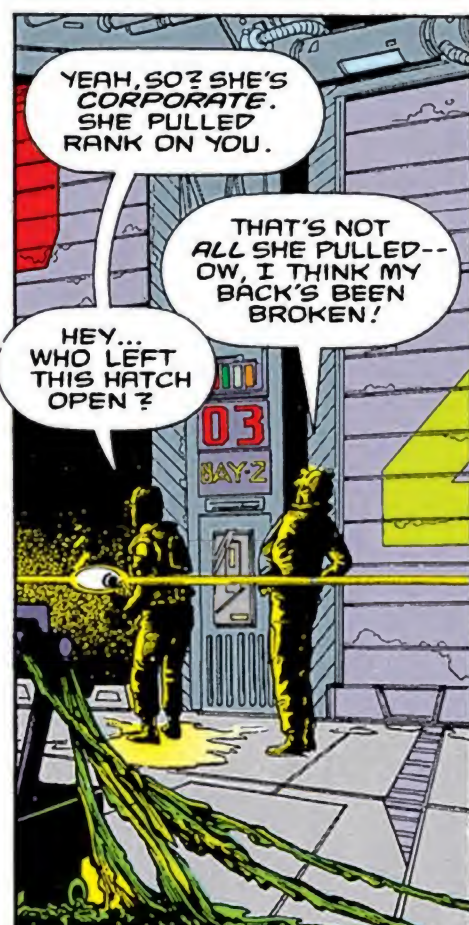
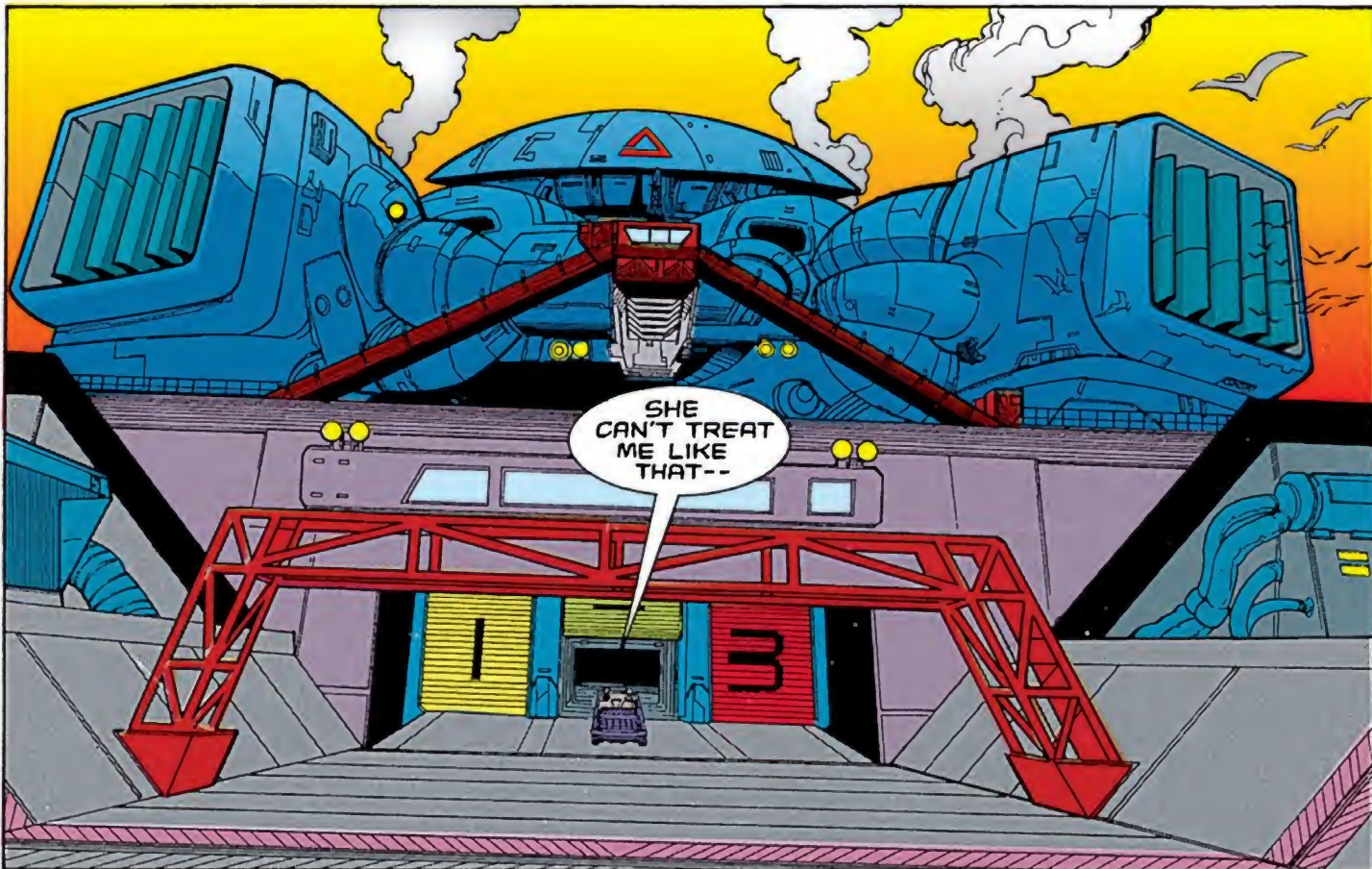
continued

will leave me with one problem, and it is exclusively carbon-based. So, where did these specimens come from? I am leaving shortly to examine the area where the specimens were discovered. Perhaps I can find clues to their origin. In the meantime, any help you could provide in identification would be most appreciated. It may be that we are dealing with an entirely new organism, and I will require instructions from your department as to how to proceed with the possible capture and containment of living specimens, and/or their shipment to your location. Please advise me ASAP (consult Noni's Standard Operating Procedures for optimum times for Leapwave—Cygni Minor interfere's with even the most basic of corporate interest in this organism, living or dead).

How does the organism survive? I don't believe they are meant to live that the creatures are designed for a very short, independent life span. Their primary purpose has been fulfilled, they die. The organs that I first examined, the esophagus and stomach are actually designed to work in reverse. The following theory doesn't make sense to you: These organisms are completely dependent on the carrier for a complete zygote destined for procreation.

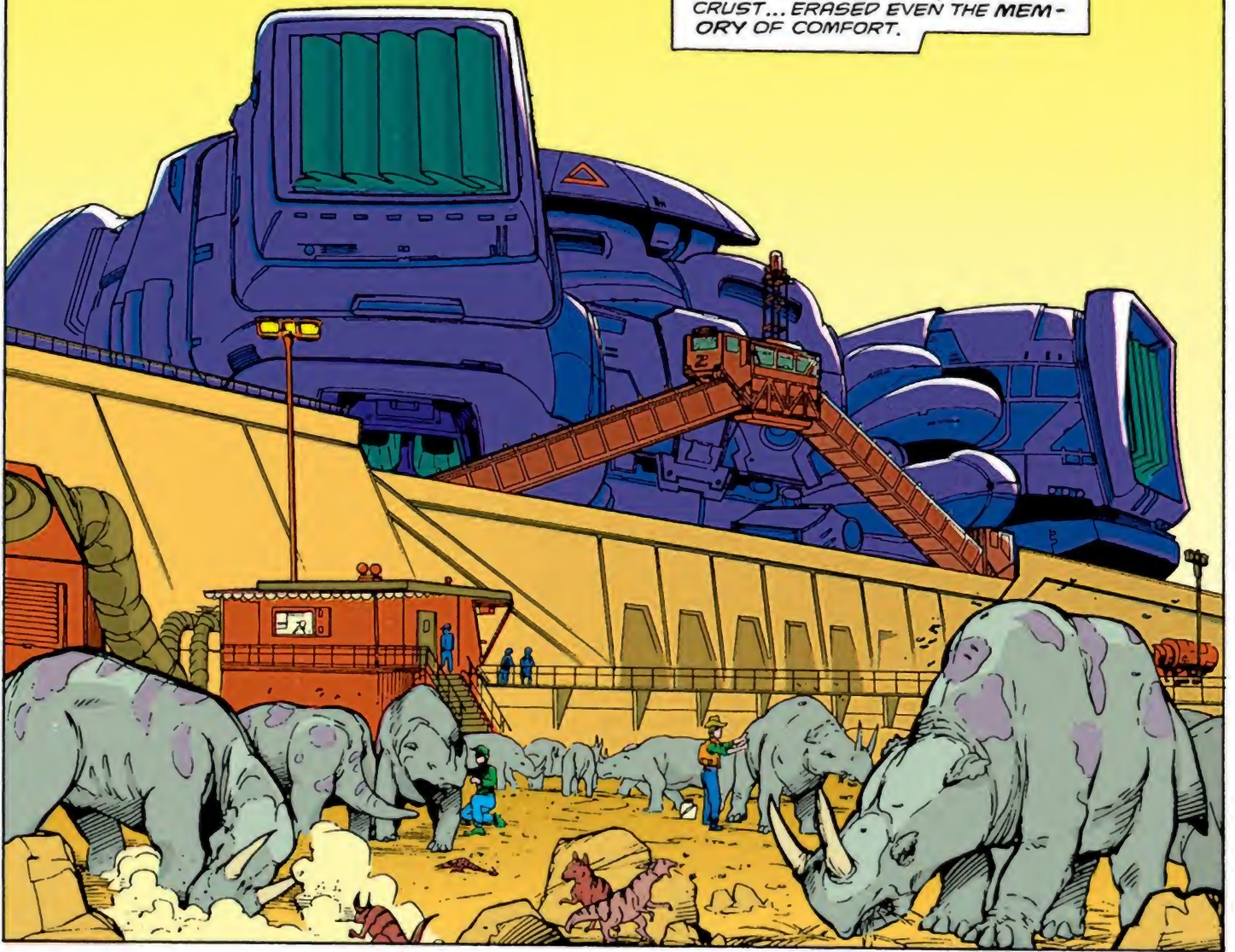
That four of the organisms have relatively smooth backs, and the single carcass with irregular scattering of chitinous spines. The differences between the two types of specimens themselves—but of a living organism is equipped for a life span of more than that of a living specimen. While it is risky to postulate too much, I believe the smooth-backed organisms are of the species-to-female (or male) type. That this is an intermediate form, and that function has to do with the proper male-to-female ratio, and that function has to do with the proper male-to-female ratio, and that function has to do with the proper male-to-female ratio.

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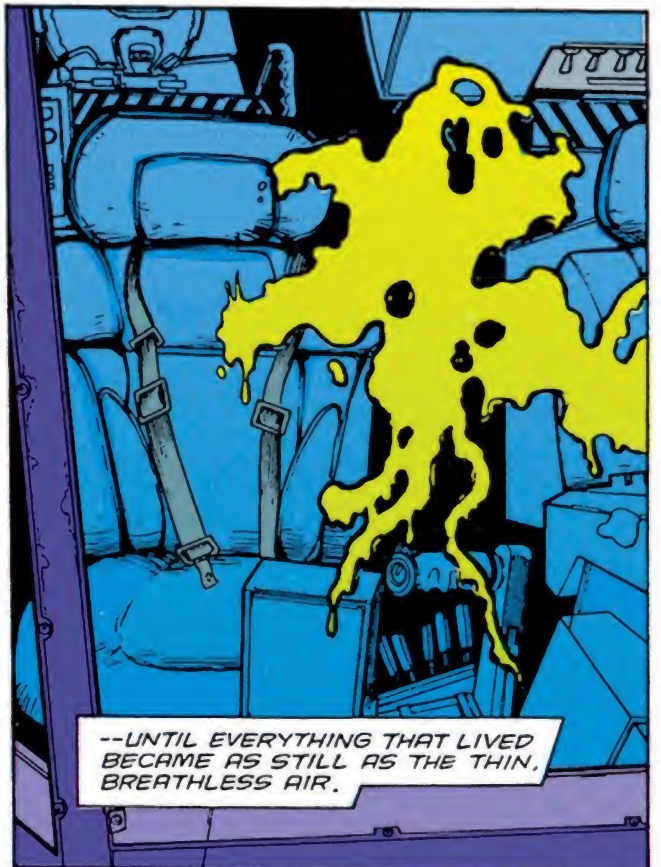




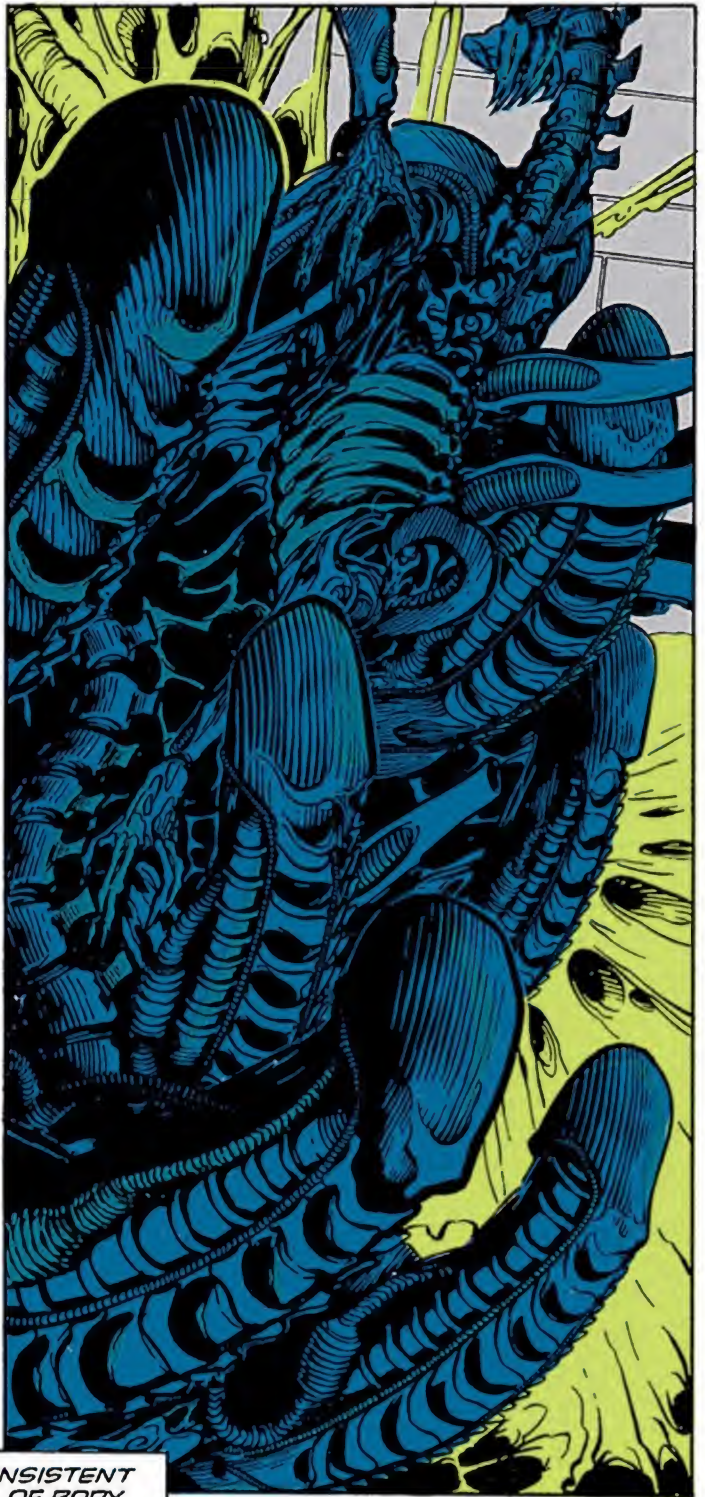
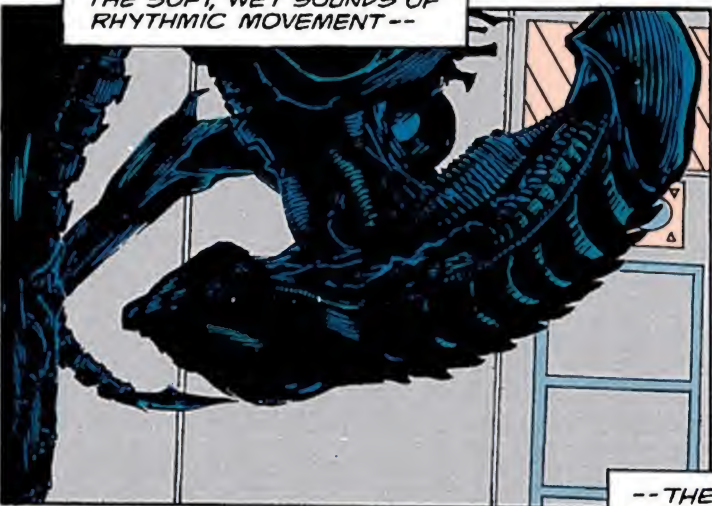
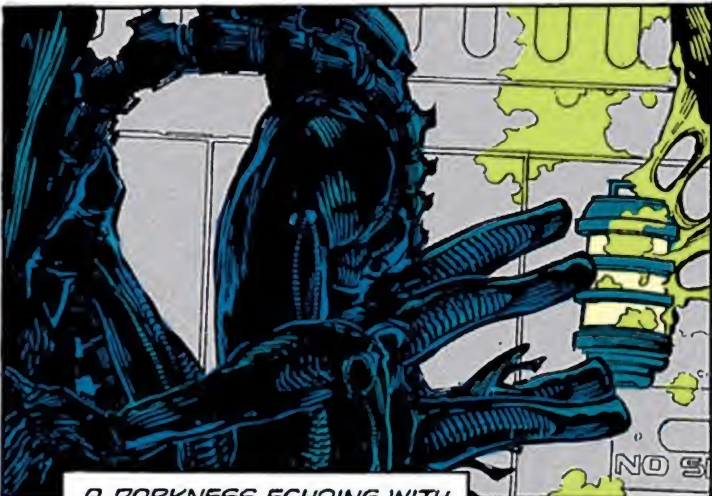
DOUBLE SUNS BLAZED UPON
PROSPERITY WELLS... BANISHED
THE SHADOWS... DRIED MEN'S
SWEAT TO A CHAFING, SALTY
CRUST... ERASED EVEN THE MEM-
ORY OF COMFORT.



AS "BIG" CYGNI AND "LITTLE" CYGNI
CREPT TOWARD THEIR ZENITHS,
ACTIVITY ON THE GROUND SLOWED--



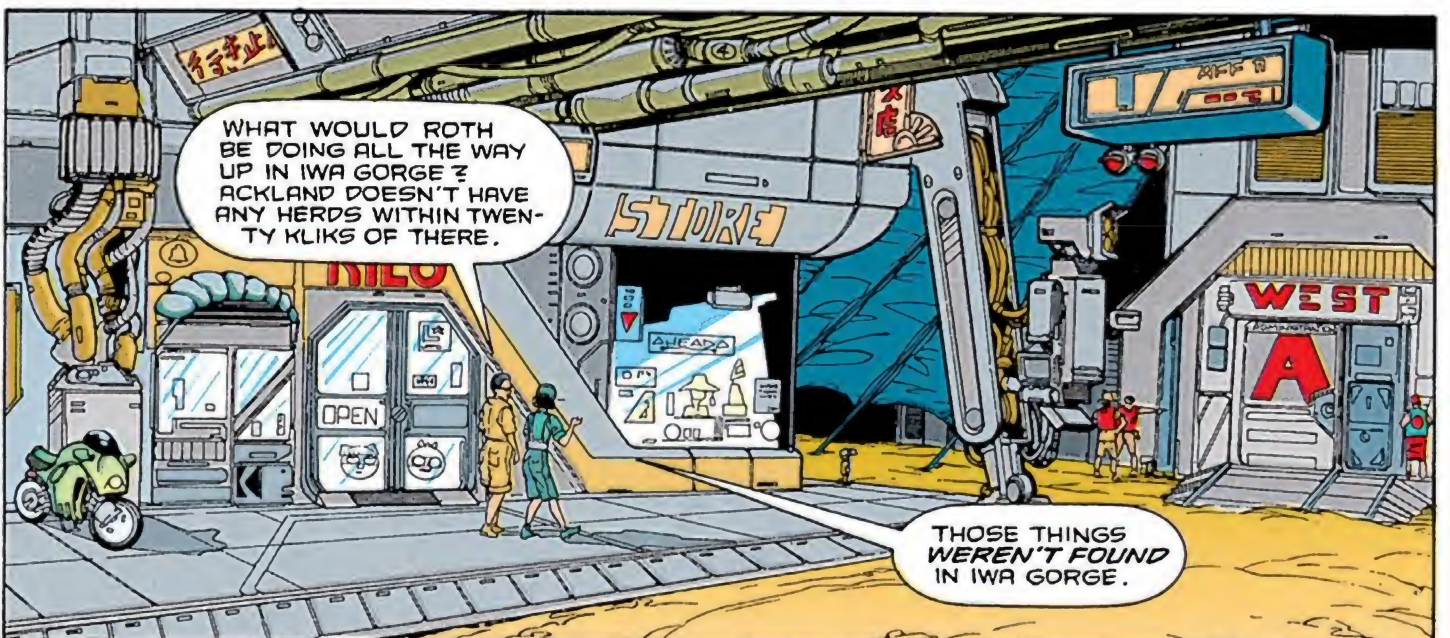
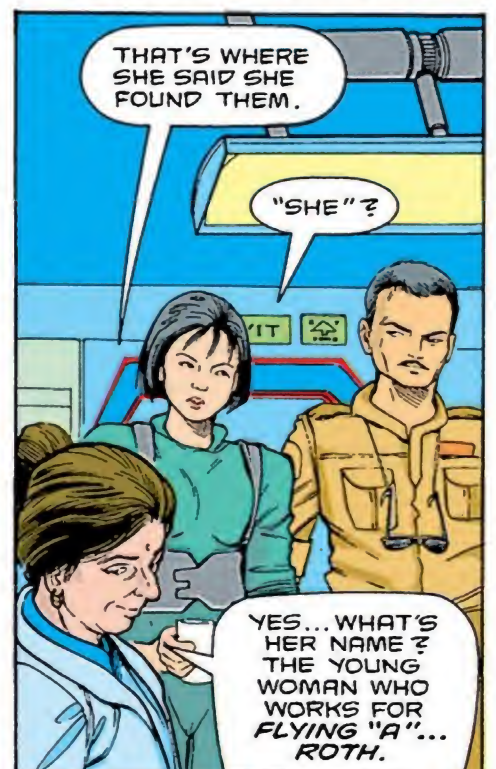
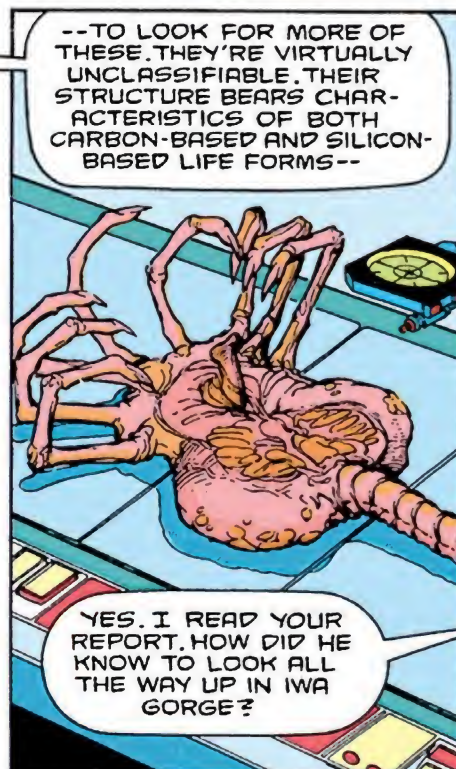
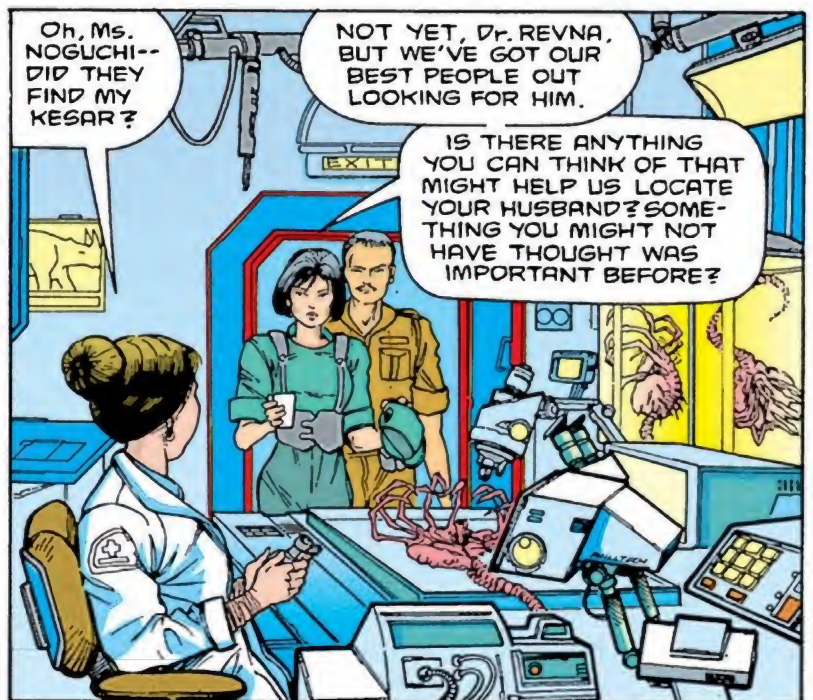
--UNTIL EVERYTHING THAT LIVED
BECAME AS STILL AS THE THIN,
BREATHLESS AIR.





--BUILDING TOWARD
A SCREAMING, FERAL
RELEASE.







Huh?

THINK ABOUT IT. IF YOU WERE ACKLAND AND YOU DISCOVERED SOME NEW LIFE FORM THE NIGHT BEFORE YOUR RHYNTH WERE TO BE SHIPPED OFF-PLANET, WOULD YOU RISK HAVING YOUR ENTIRE YEAR'S PROFITS HELD UP IN QUARANTINE?



NO. YOU'D SAY THE LIFE FORM WAS DISCOVERED FAR FROM WHERE YOUR HERD WAS PASTURED.

BUT WHY WOULD HE REPORT IT AT ALL?

TO COVER HIS ASS. SAY HIS RHYNTH *DO* COME DOWN WITH SOME UNKNOWN DISEASE. HE'S DONE HIS DUTY-- HE REPORTED THE DISCOVERY. HOW WAS HE TO KNOW HIS HERD HAD COME IN CONTACT WITH ANYTHING UNUSUAL?



SO WHAT'S OUR NEXT MOVE?

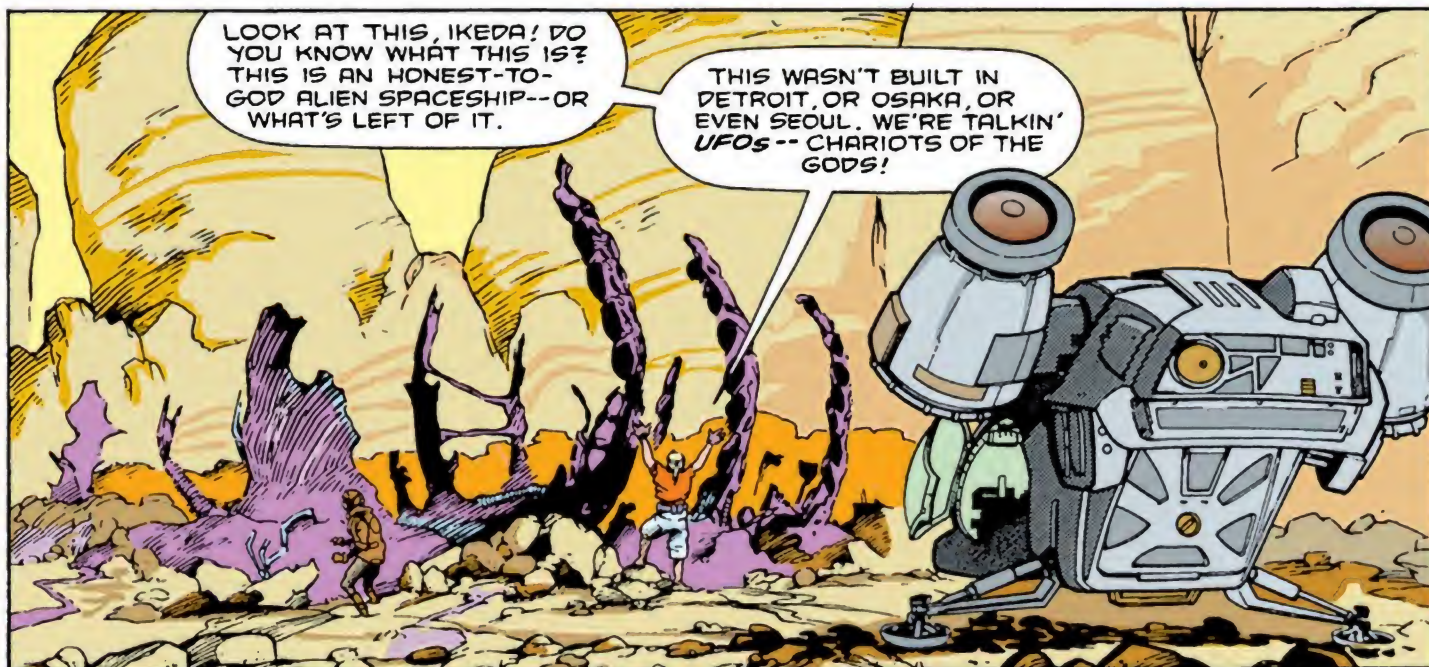
WE TALK TO ROTH FIRST, THEN ACKLAND. IF ANYTHING HAS HAPPENED TO REVNA, HE'LL PAY.

HE SENT REVNA ON A WILD GOOSE CHASE--



--THERE'S NOTHING UP AT IWA GORGE BUT ROCKS AND SAND."

I DON'T BELIEVE IT. I DON'T SHITTIN' BELIEVE IT!



LOOK AT THIS, IKEDA! DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS? THIS IS AN HONEST-TO-GOD ALIEN SPACESHIP--OR WHAT'S LEFT OF IT.

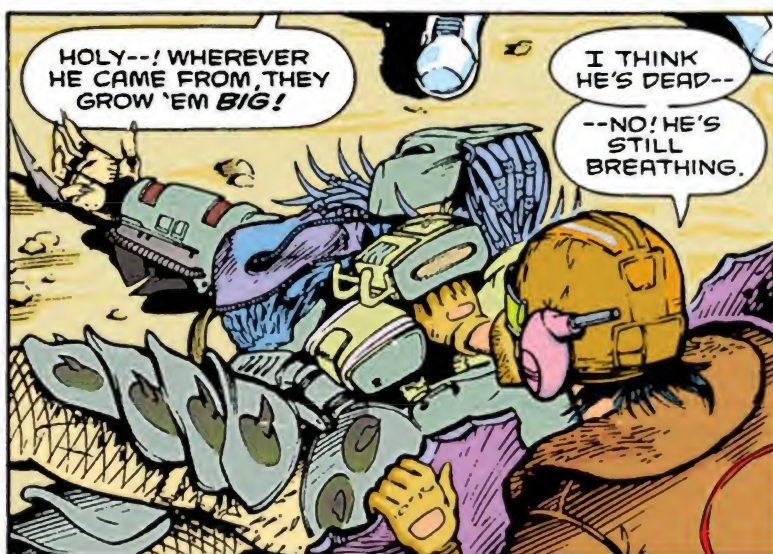
THIS WASN'T BUILT IN DETROIT, OR OSAKA, OR EVEN SEOUL. WE'RE TALKIN' *UFOs*-- CHARIOTS OF THE GODS!



THINK OF THE NEW INFORMATION! IF WE CAN FIGURE OUT WHAT MADE THIS THING TICK--

WHY NOT JUST ASK HIM?

WHA--?



HOLY---! WHEREVER HE CAME FROM, THEY GROW 'EM *BIG*!

I THINK HE'S DEAD--

--NO! HE'S STILL BREATHING.



THIS IS TOO SHITTIN' UN-BELIEVABLE! I MEAN--

CAN IT, SPANNER. HELP ME GET HIM INTO THE COPTER.



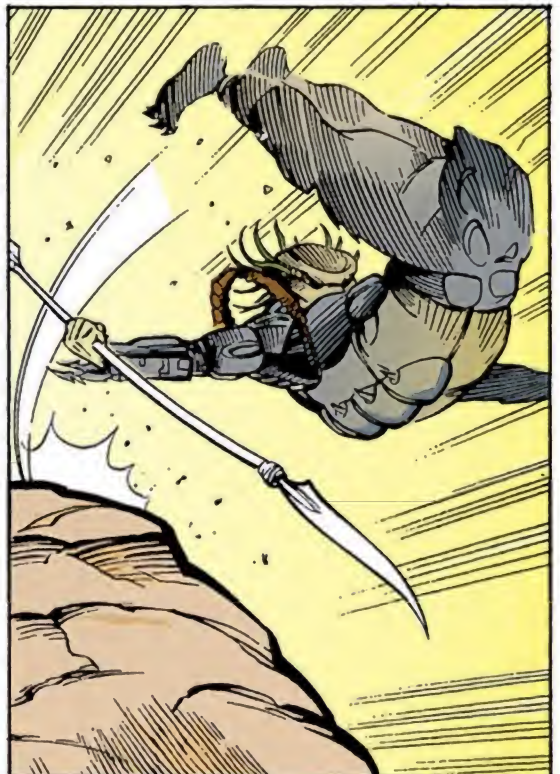
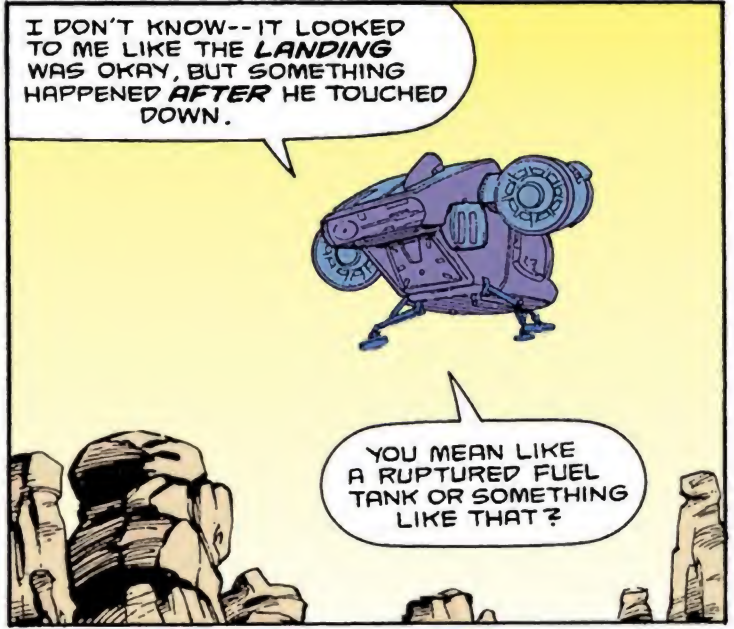
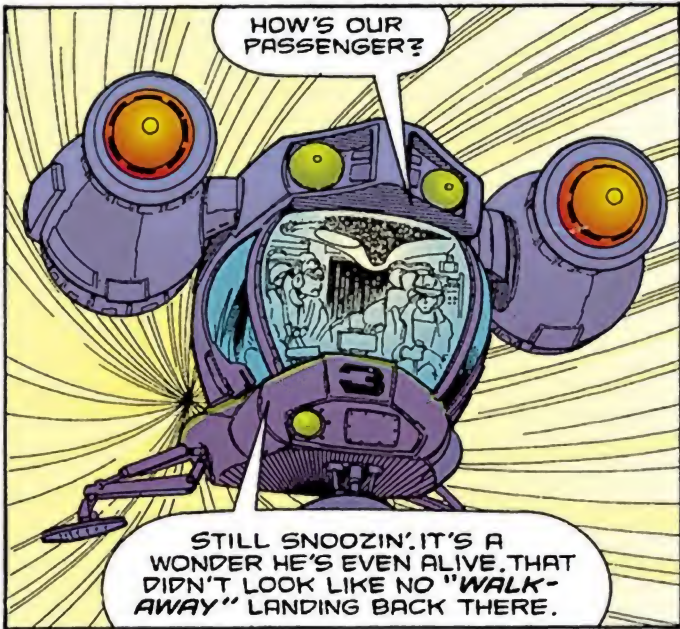
SAY AGAIN, COPTER-1-- YOU FOUND *WHAT*?

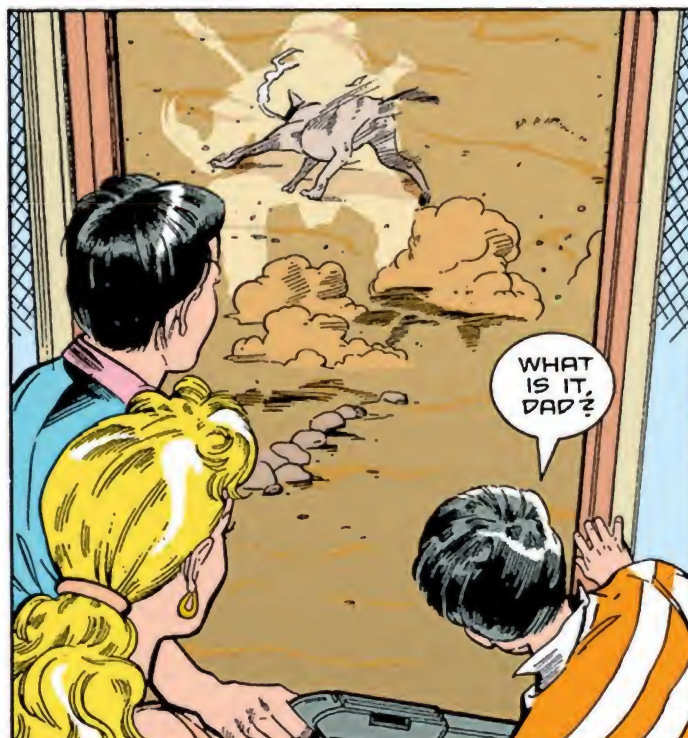
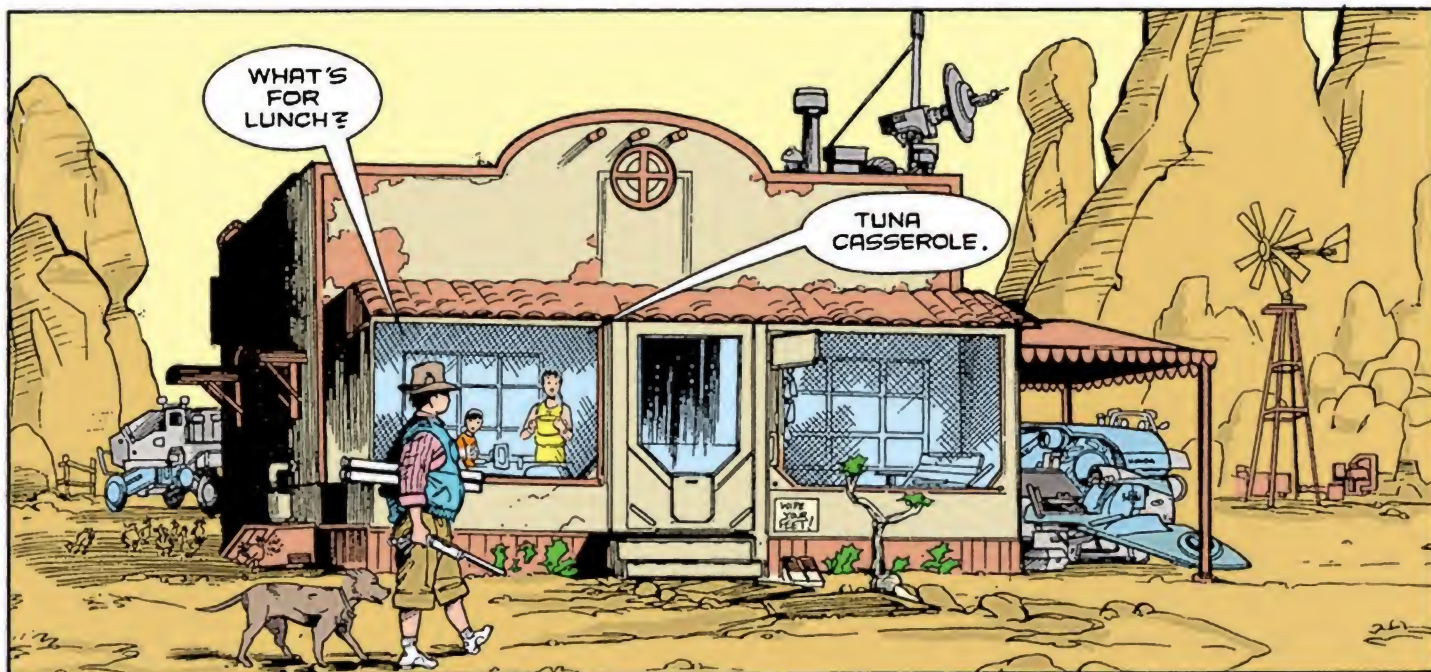
NEVER MIND. YOU'LL SEE IT WHEN WE GET BACK.

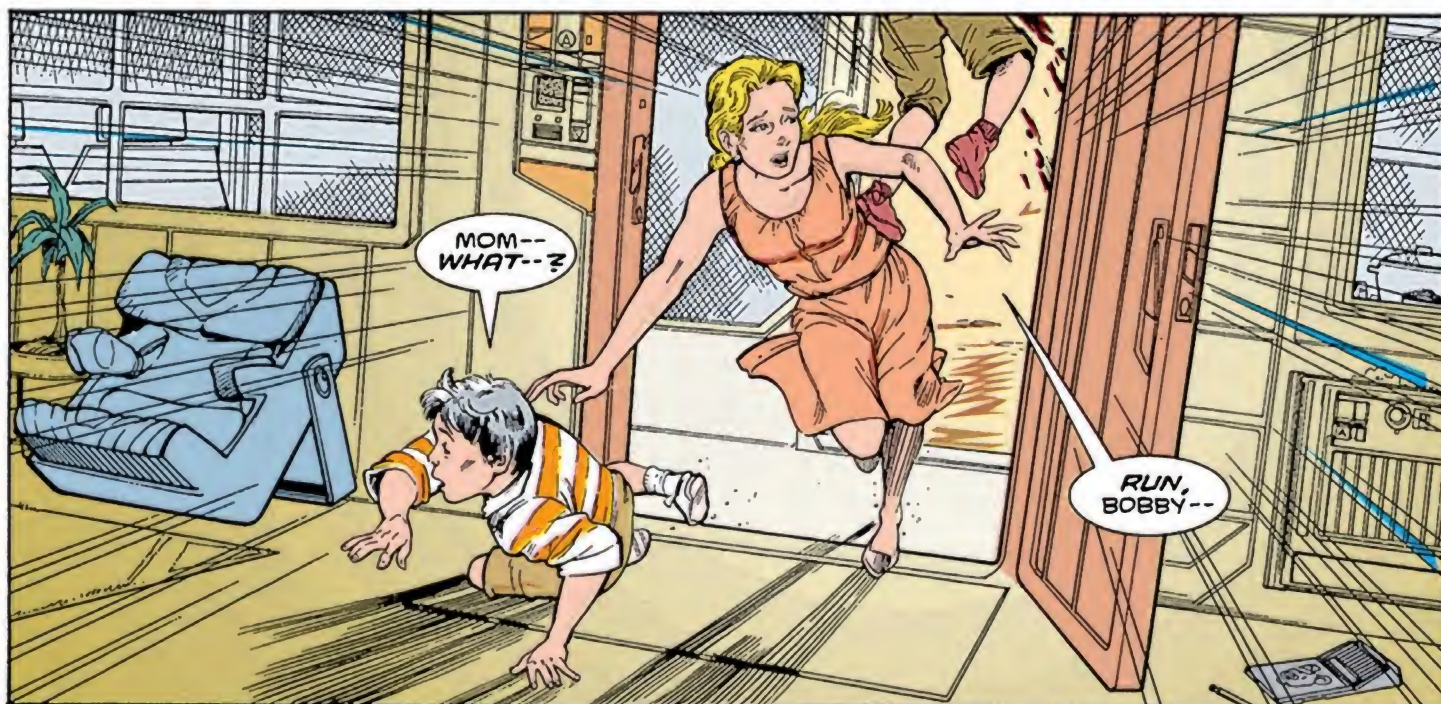
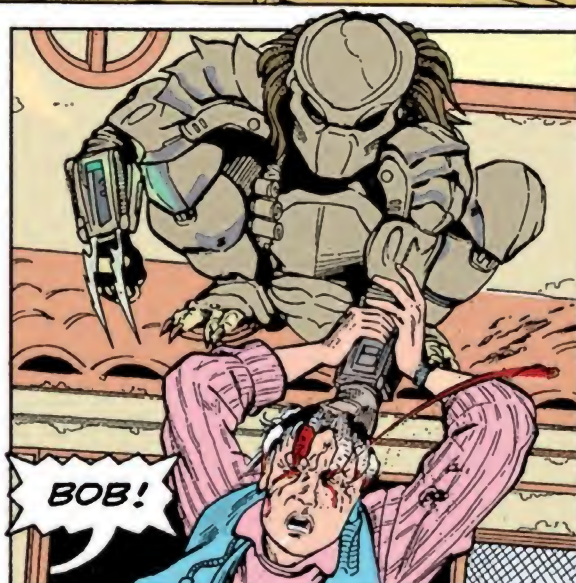


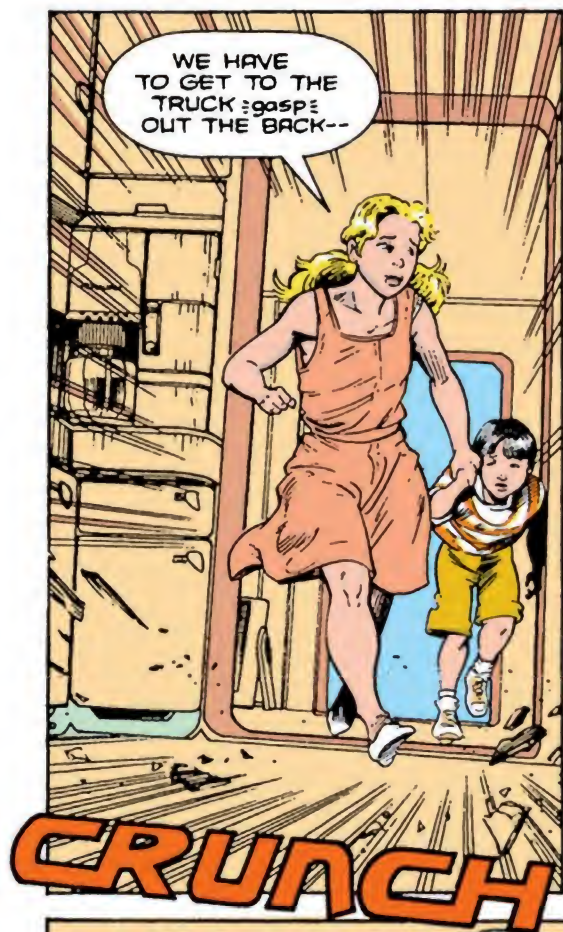
NO SIGN OF THE DOC ANYWHERE-- BUT WHAT WE'VE FOUND CAN'T WAIT. COPTER-1 RETURNING TO BASE. IKEDA OUT.

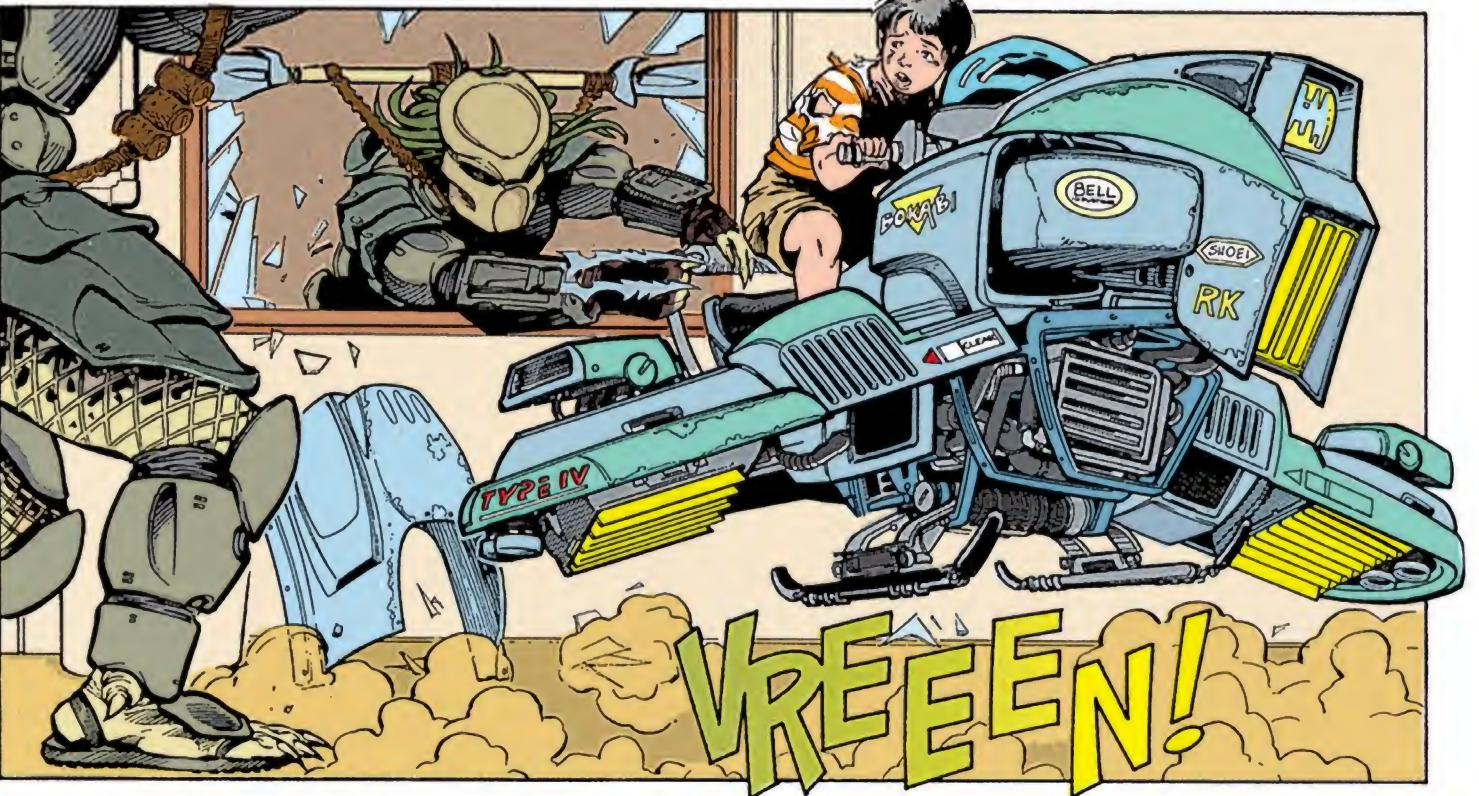
"HELP HER," SHE SAYS. THIS GUY WEIGHS A SHITTIN' TON...

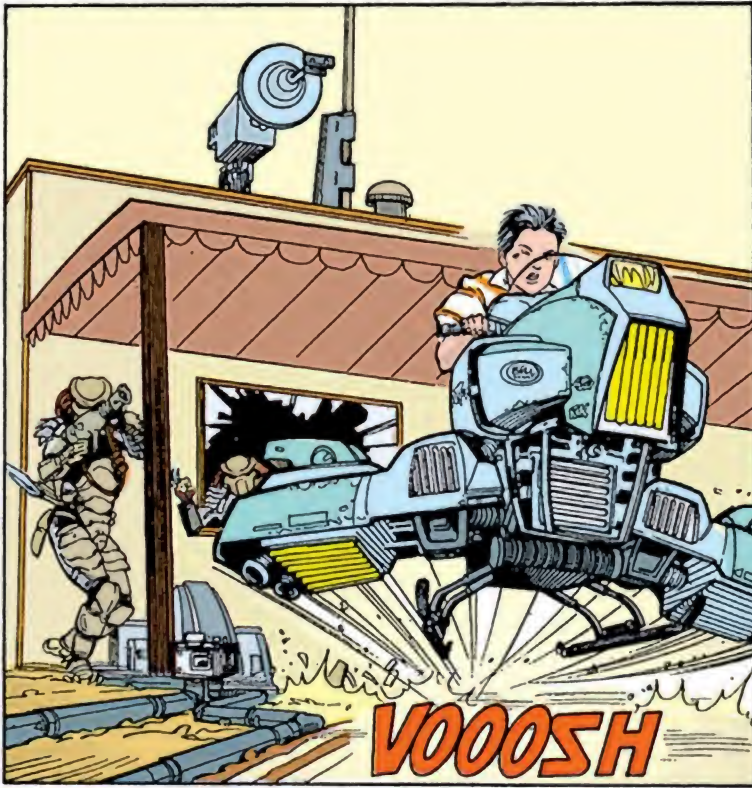


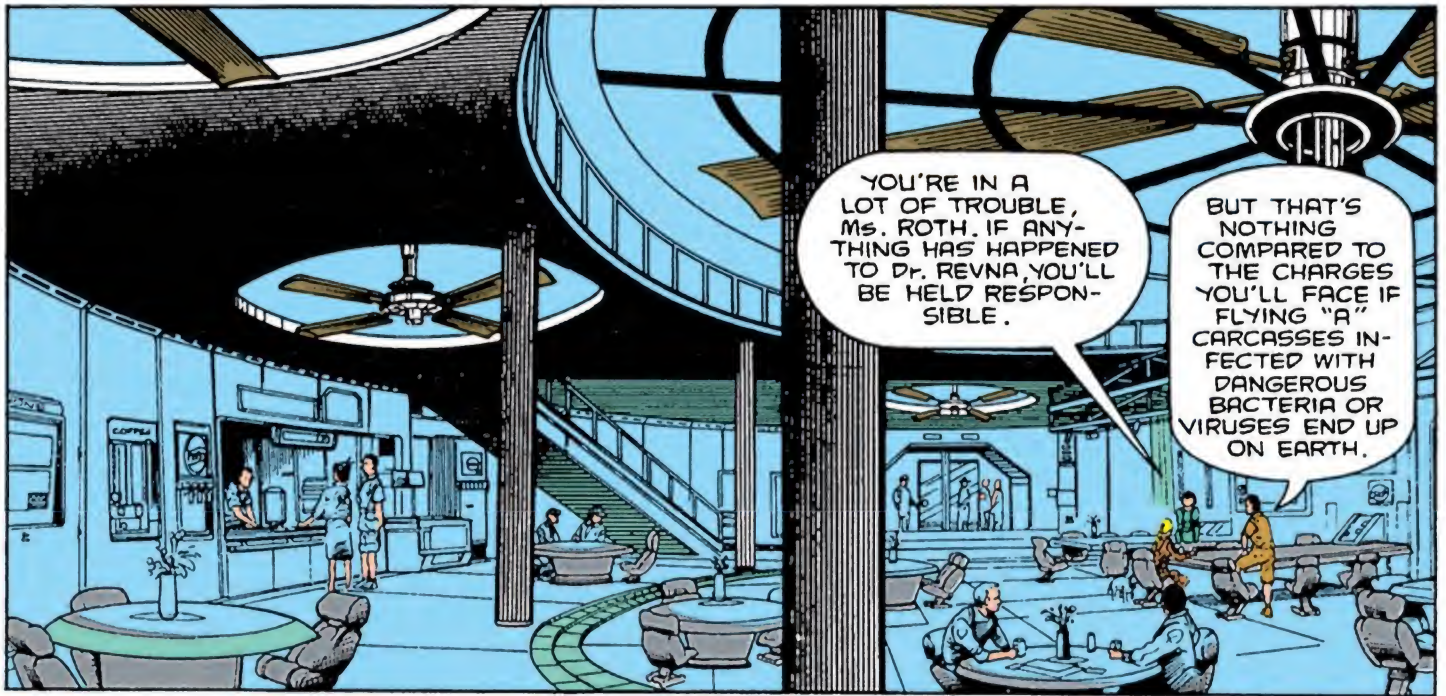












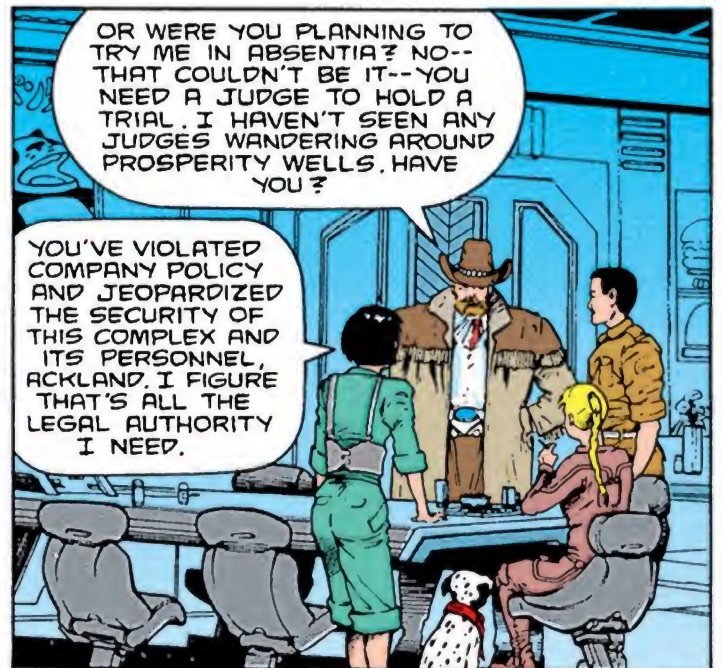
YOU'RE IN A LOT OF TROUBLE, MS. ROTH. IF ANYTHING HAS HAPPENED TO DR. REVNA, YOU'LL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE.

BUT THAT'S NOTHING COMPARED TO THE CHARGES YOU'LL FACE IF FLYING "A" CARCASSES INFECTED WITH DANGEROUS BACTERIA OR VIRUSES END UP ON EARTH.



BUT IT'S NOT MY FAULT--I WAS JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS. MR. ACKLAND TOLD ME TO--

HEY, NOGUCHI-- I THOUGHT A MAN HAD A RIGHT TO BE PRESENT WHEN HIS ACCUSERS WERE TESTIFYING AGAINST HIM.



OR WERE YOU PLANNING TO TRY ME IN ABSENTIA? NO-- THAT COULDN'T BE IT--YOU NEED A JUDGE TO HOLD A TRIAL. I HAVEN'T SEEN ANY JUDGES WANDERING AROUND PROSPERITY WELLS. HAVE YOU?

YOU'VE VIOLATED COMPANY POLICY AND JEOPARDIZED THE SECURITY OF THIS COMPLEX AND ITS PERSONNEL, ACKLAND. I FIGURE THAT'S ALL THE LEGAL AUTHORITY I NEED.

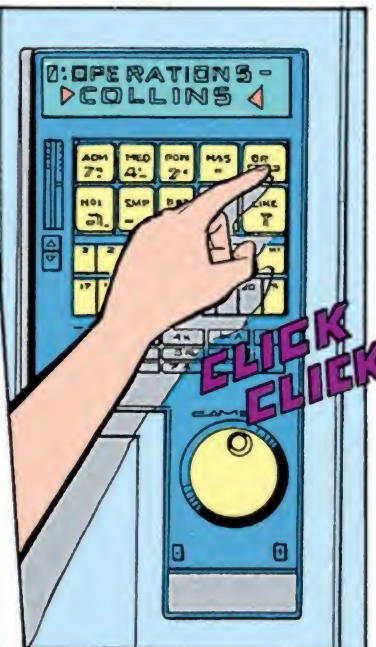
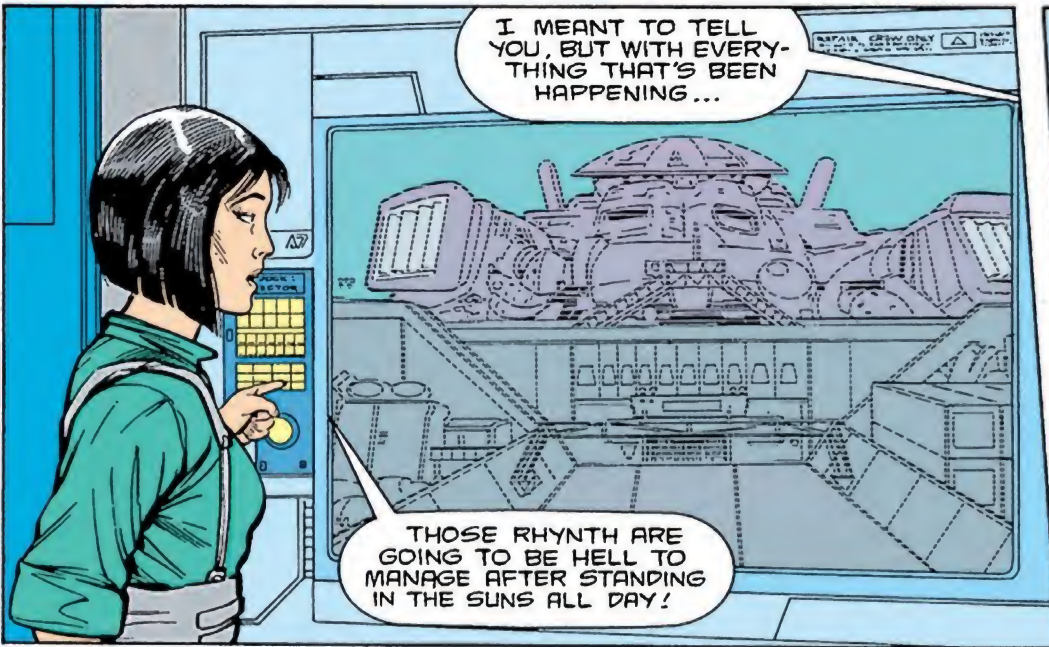
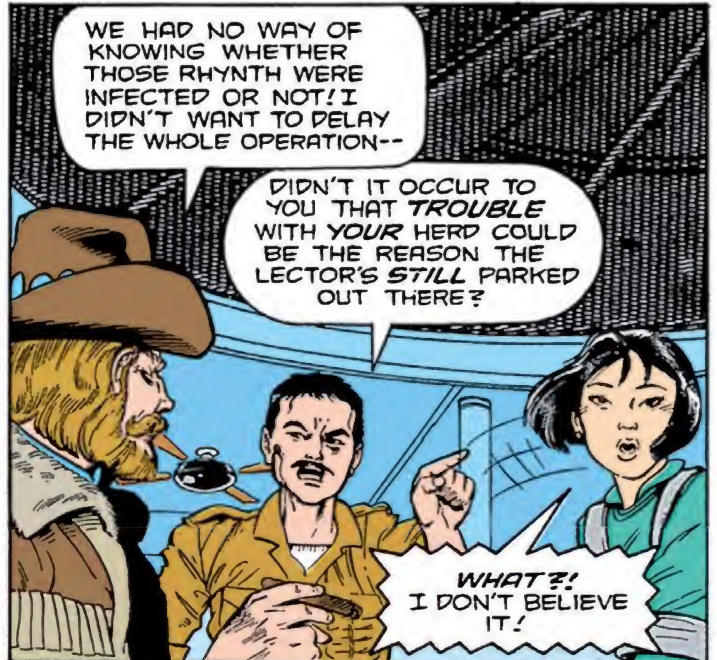


"FRONTIER JUSTICE," EH? YOU REALLY THINK YOU'VE GOT THE BACKING TO MAKE CHARGES STICK? IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, MS. NOGUCHI, YOU AREN'T EXACTLY THE MOST POPULAR PERSON IN THIS SETTLEMENT.

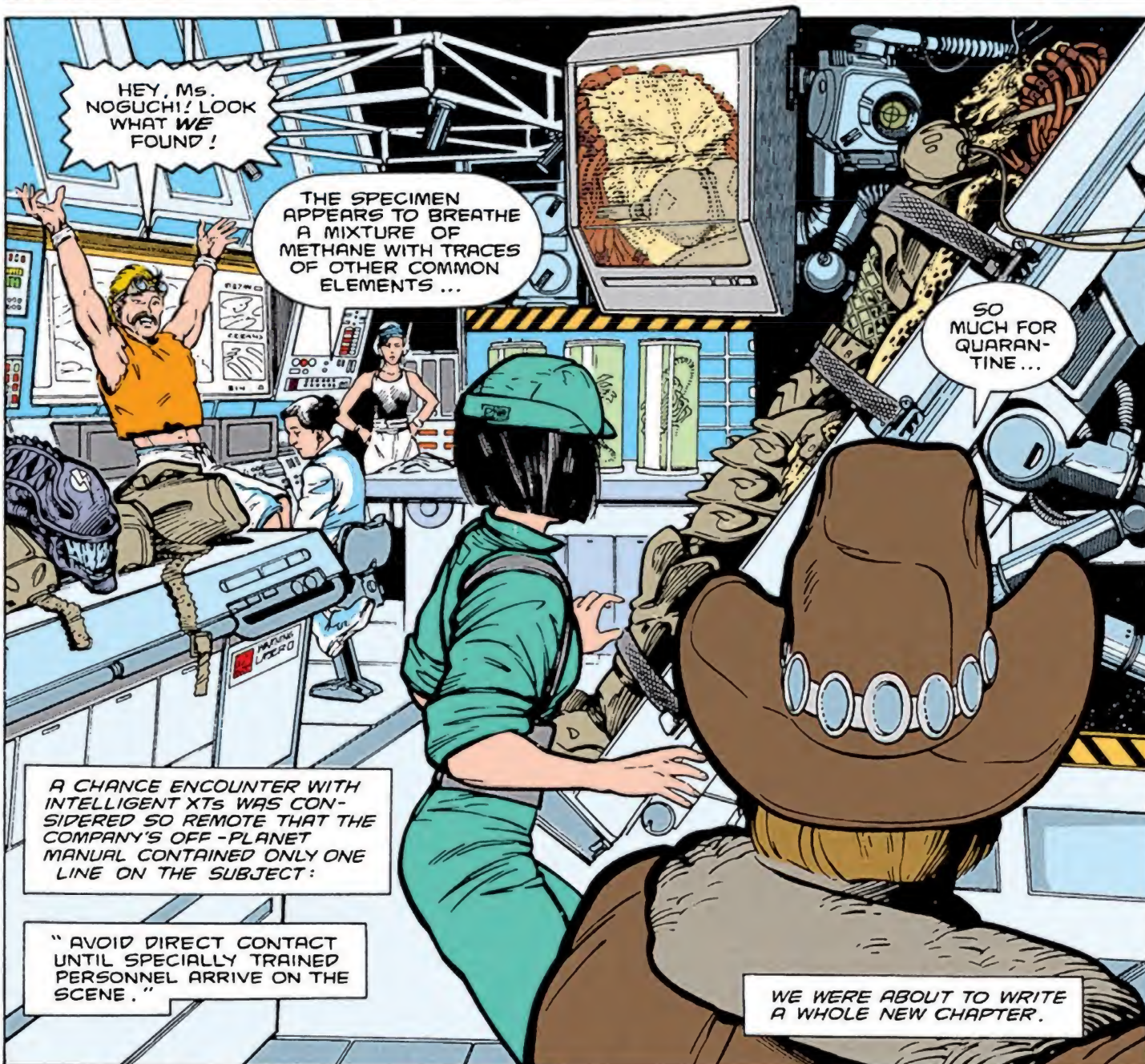
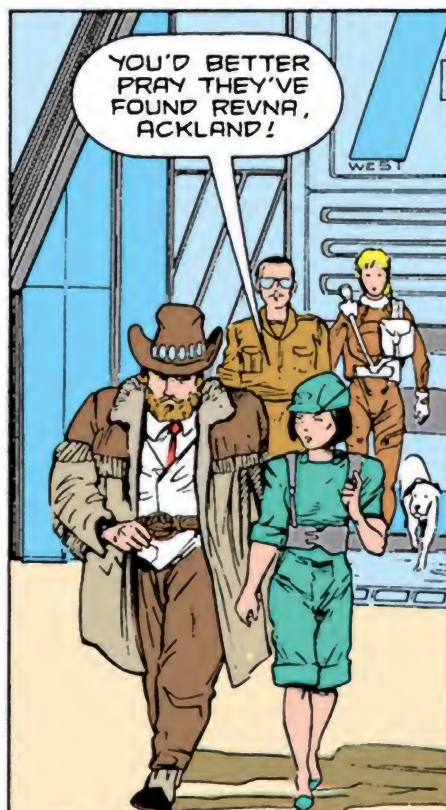
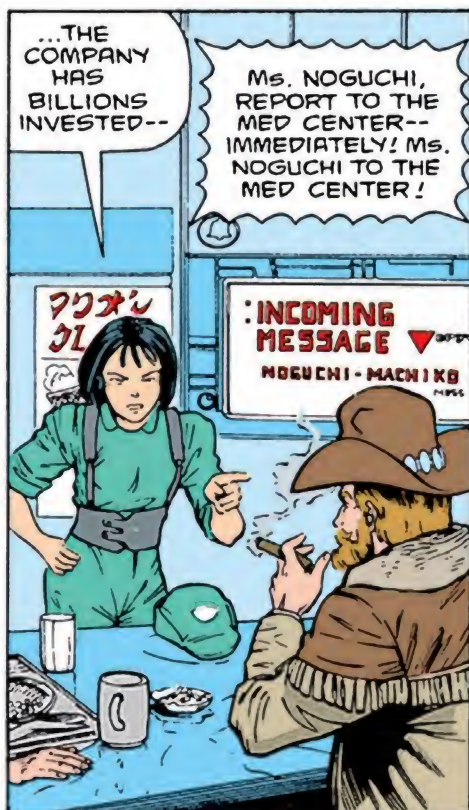
YOU'RE RIGHT--I'M JUST THE NEW BOSS, BUT DOC REVNA HAS BEEN HERE SINCE THE BEGINNING--TREATING THE RANCHERS' STOCK, TREATING THEIR FAMILIES--



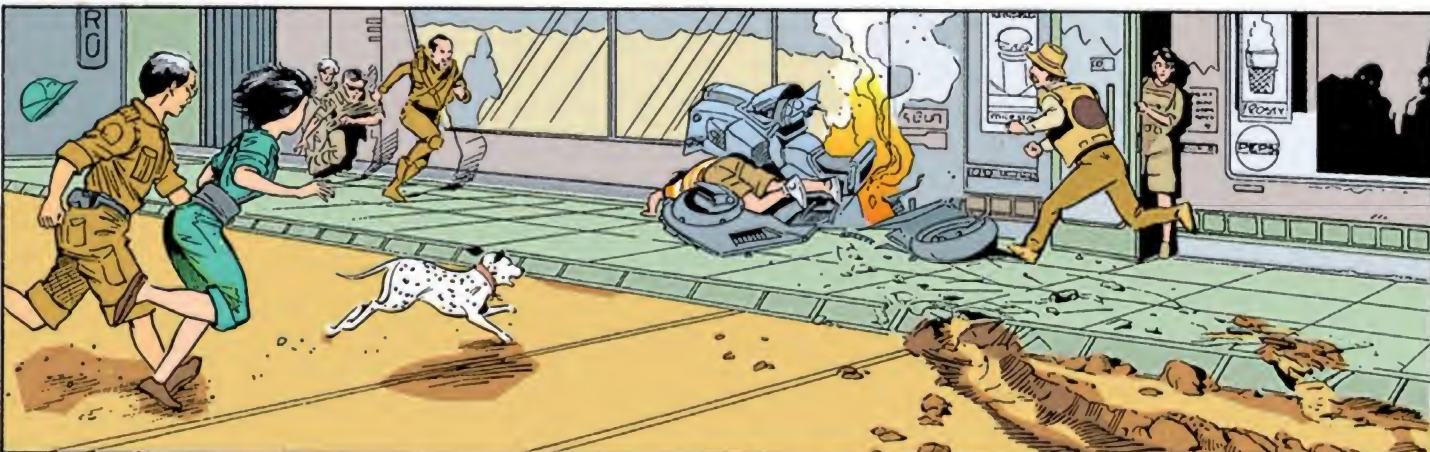
--DELIVERING THEIR BABIES. SO FAR, THE DOC'S JUST LISTED AS MISSING. BUT IF HE TURNS UP DEAD, WHO DO YOU THINK FOLKS ARE GOING TO SIDE WITH: YOU--OR HIS GRIEVING WIDOW?











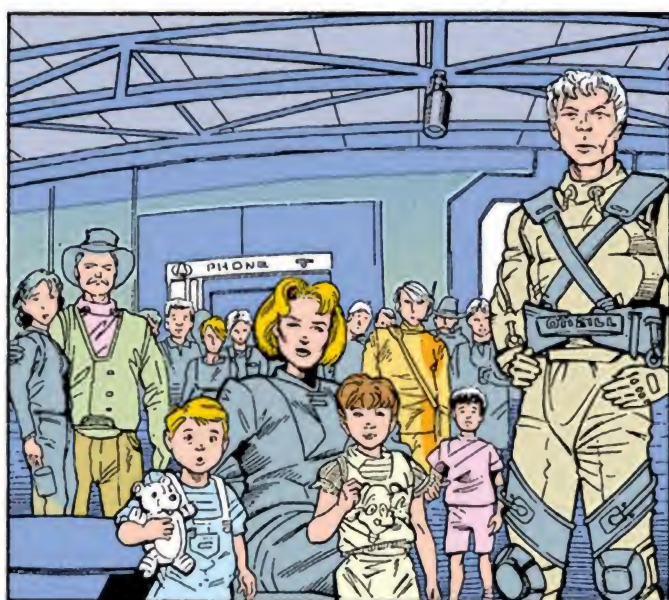
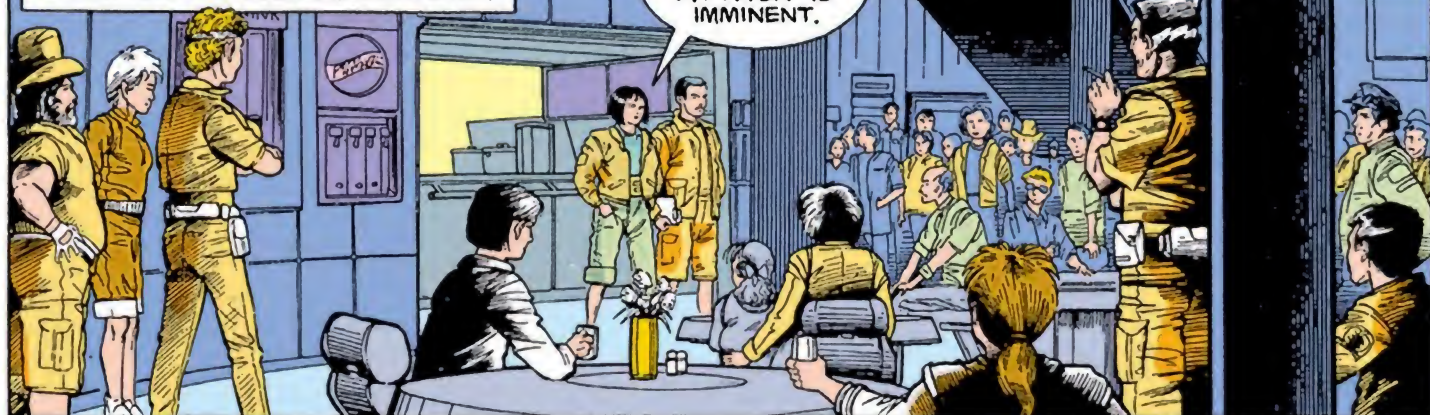


I CALLED A TOWN MEETING TO FILL EVERYONE IN ON WHAT WAS HAPPENING.

IT SOUNDED UNBELIEVABLE, EVEN TO ME. BUT, AFTER WE WERE UNABLE TO REACH THEM BY RADIO, I HAD IKEDA DO A FLY-BY OF THE SHELDON RANCH. THE HOUSE WAS IN FLAMES, AND THE FAMILY'S BREEDING STOCK HAD ALL BEEN SLAUGHTERED.

ADD TO THAT OUR "PATIENT" IN THE MED CENTER, AND--

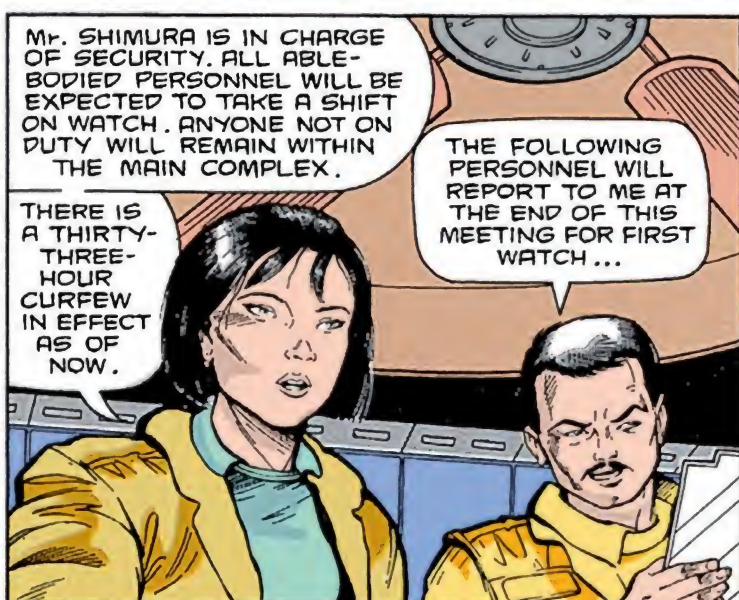
--WE MUST ASSUME AN ATTACK IS IMMINENT.



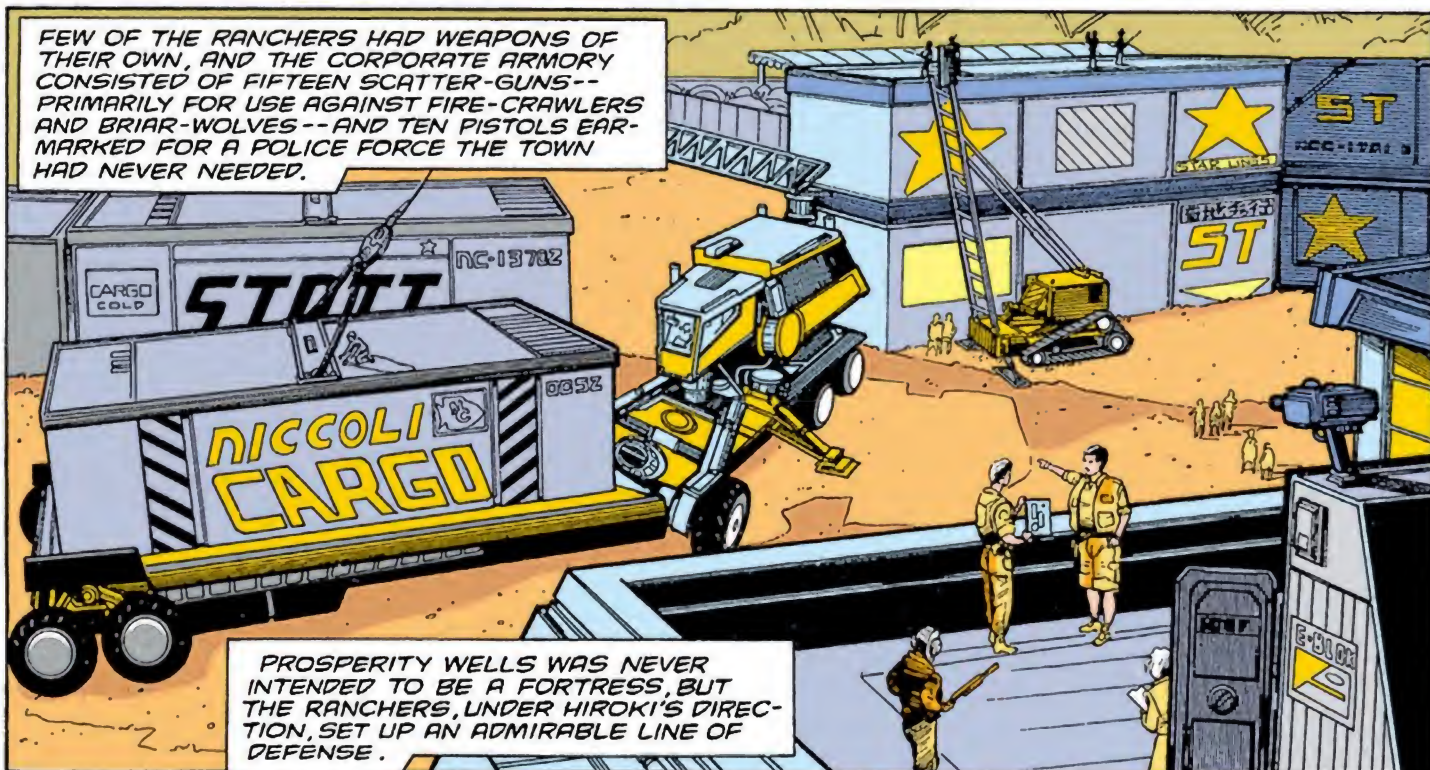
MR. SHIMURA IS IN CHARGE OF SECURITY. ALL ABLE-BODIED PERSONNEL WILL BE EXPECTED TO TAKE A SHIFT ON WATCH. ANYONE NOT ON DUTY WILL REMAIN WITHIN THE MAIN COMPLEX.

THERE IS A THIRTY-THREE-HOUR CURFEW IN EFFECT AS OF NOW.

THE FOLLOWING PERSONNEL WILL REPORT TO ME AT THE END OF THIS MEETING FOR FIRST WATCH...

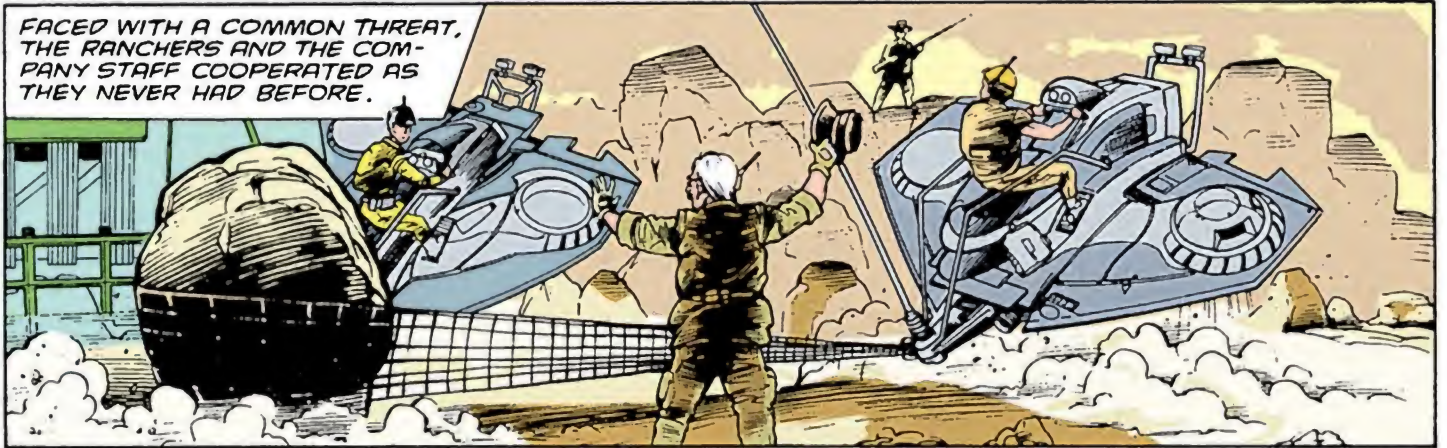


FEW OF THE RANCHERS HAD WEAPONS OF THEIR OWN, AND THE CORPORATE ARMORY CONSISTED OF FIFTEEN SCATTER-GUNS--PRIMARILY FOR USE AGAINST FIRE-CRAWLERS AND BRIAR-WOLVES--AND TEN PISTOLS EARMARKED FOR A POLICE FORCE THE TOWN HAD NEVER NEEDED.

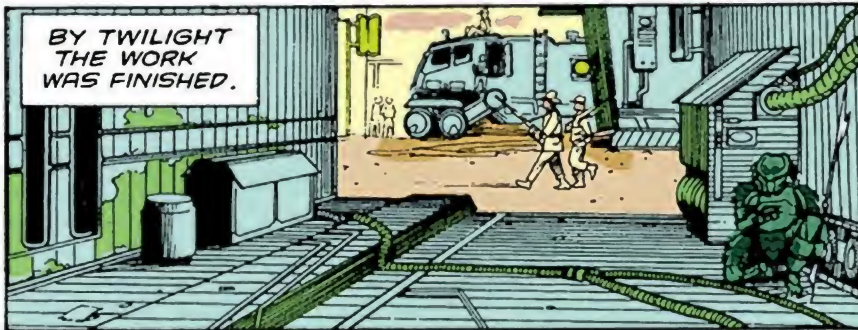


PROSPERITY WELLS WAS NEVER INTENDED TO BE A FORTRESS, BUT THE RANCHERS, UNDER HIROKI'S DIRECTION, SET UP AN ADMIRABLE LINE OF DEFENSE.

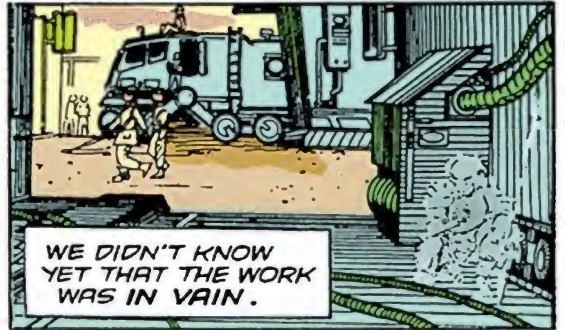
FACED WITH A COMMON THREAT, THE RANCHERS AND THE COMPANY STAFF COOPERATED AS THEY NEVER HAD BEFORE.



BY TWILIGHT THE WORK WAS FINISHED.

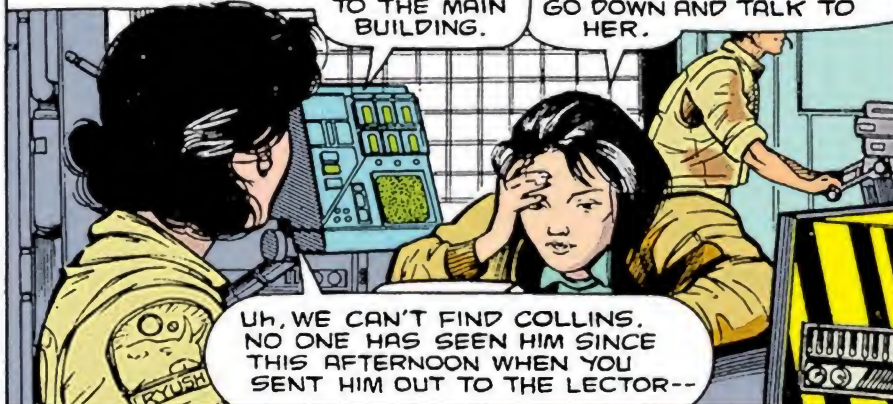


WE DIDN'T KNOW YET THAT THE WORK WAS IN VAIN.



MOST EVERYONE'S IN FROM THE OUTLYING RANCHES, MS. NOGUCHI. TWO DON'T ANSWER OUR SUMMONS-- OUR ONLY LOCAL HOLDOUT IS DR. REVNA. SHE REFUSES TO BE MOVED TO THE MAIN BUILDING.

WE'LL HAVE TO ASSUME OUR ATTACKERS HAVE TAKEN THE TWO RANCHES. AS FOR REVNA, COLLINS IS HER FRIEND-- HAVE HIM GO DOWN AND TALK TO HER.



UH, WE CAN'T FIND COLLINS. NO ONE HAS SEEN HIM SINCE THIS AFTERNOON WHEN YOU SENT HIM OUT TO THE LECTOR--

DO I HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING AROUND HERE MYSELF? ALL RIGHT-- I'M GOING OUT THERE!



HOLD IT! GOING OUT WHERE?

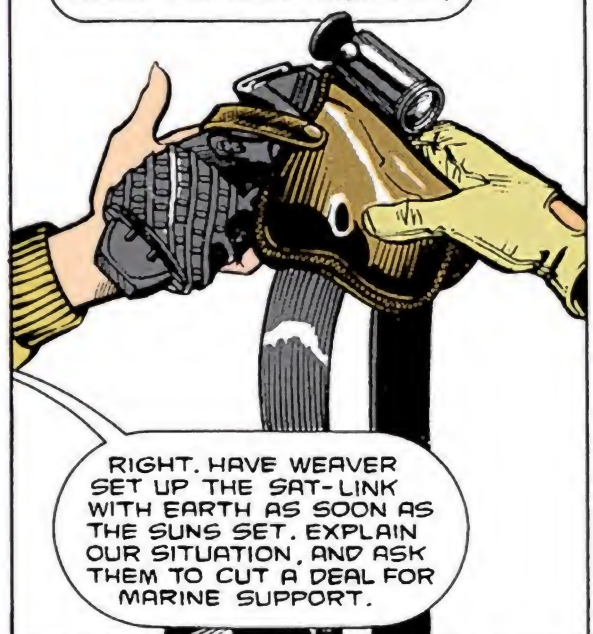
TO THE LECTOR. COLLINS HASN'T COME BACK. I'M GOING TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THEM--

MACHIKO, IT ISN'T SAFE...

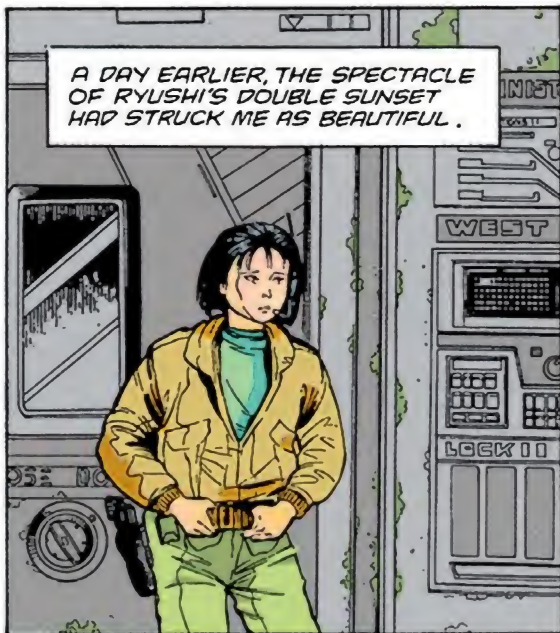
--BUT FIRST I'M GOING TO TRY AND TALK SOME SENSE INTO DR. REVNA.



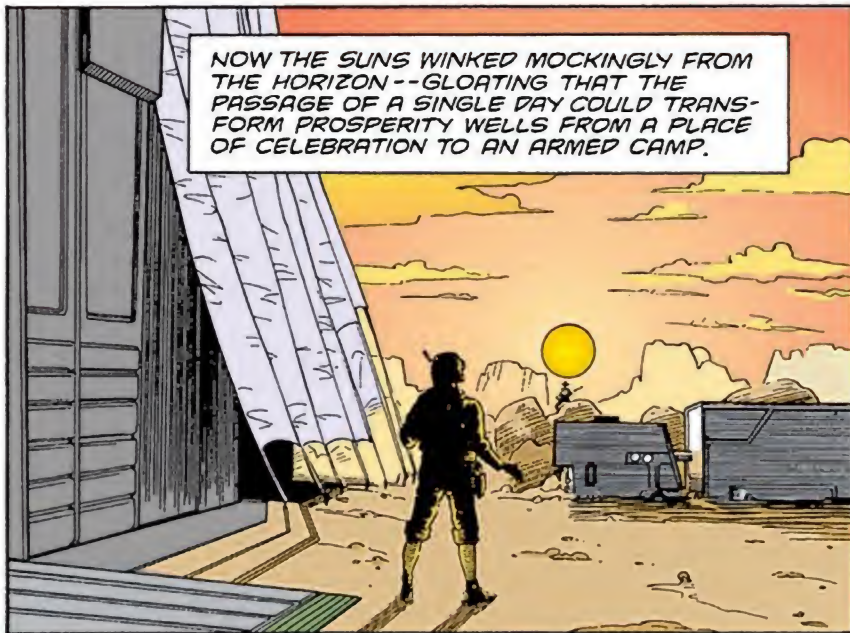
Okay... I CAN SEE YOU'VE MADE UP YOUR MIND. BUT TAKE THIS. I'LL CALL THE SENTRIES AND LET THEM KNOW YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY.



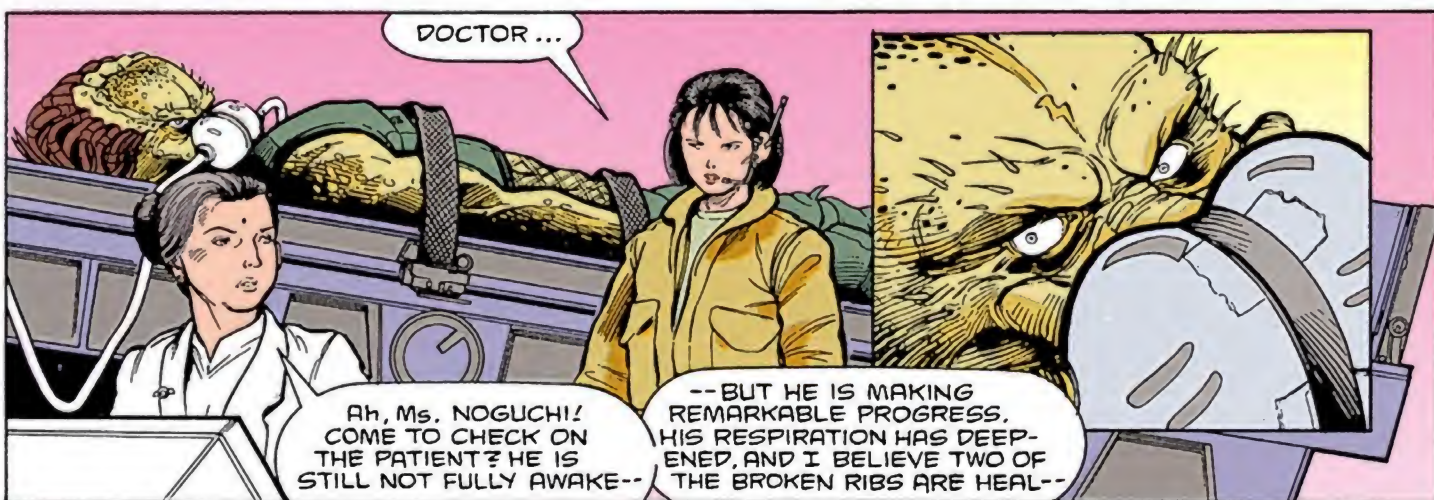
RIGHT. HAVE WEAVER SET UP THE SAT-LINK WITH EARTH AS SOON AS THE SUNS SET. EXPLAIN OUR SITUATION, AND ASK THEM TO CUT A DEAL FOR MARINE SUPPORT.



A DAY EARLIER, THE SPECTACLE OF RYUSHI'S DOUBLE SUNSET HAD STRUCK ME AS BEAUTIFUL.



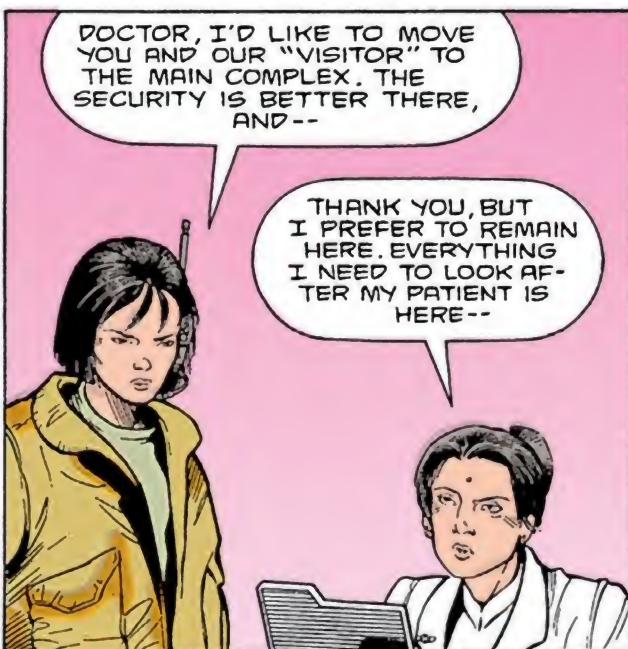
NOW THE SUNS WINKED MOCKINGLY FROM THE HORIZON--GLOATING THAT THE PASSAGE OF A SINGLE DAY COULD TRANSFORM PROSPERITY WELLS FROM A PLACE OF CELEBRATION TO AN ARMED CAMP.



DOCTOR...

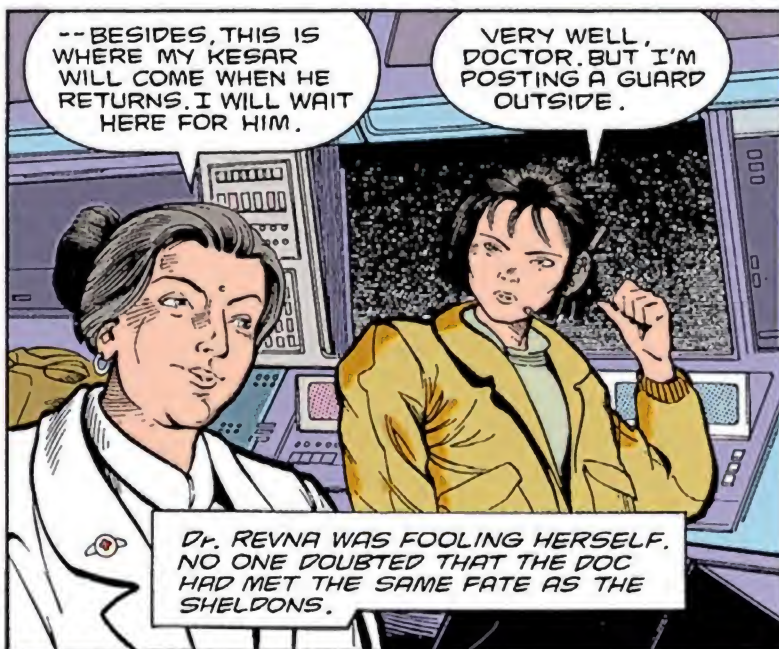
Ah, Ms. NOGUCHI! COME TO CHECK ON THE PATIENT? HE IS STILL NOT FULLY AWAKE--

--BUT HE IS MAKING REMARKABLE PROGRESS. HIS RESPIRATION HAS DEEPENED, AND I BELIEVE TWO OF THE BROKEN RIBS ARE HEAL--



DOCTOR, I'D LIKE TO MOVE YOU AND OUR "VISITOR" TO THE MAIN COMPLEX. THE SECURITY IS BETTER THERE, AND--

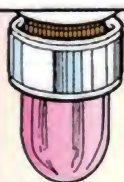
THANK YOU, BUT I PREFER TO REMAIN HERE. EVERYTHING I NEED TO LOOK AFTER MY PATIENT IS HERE--



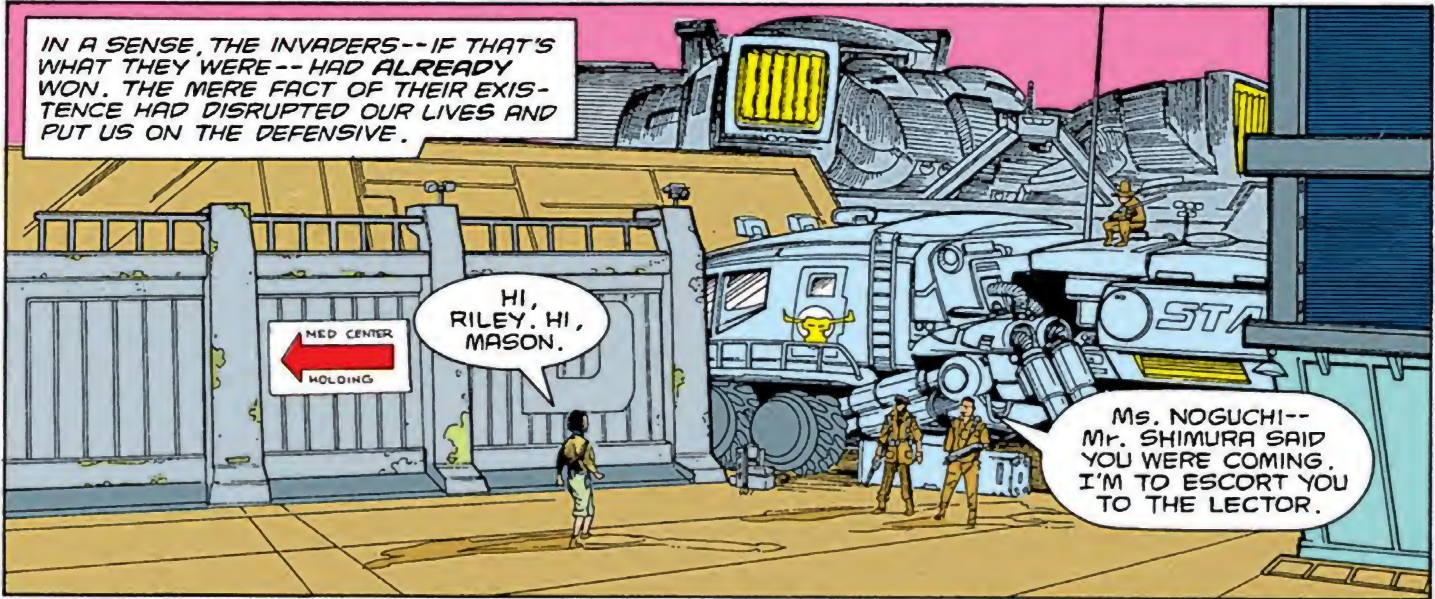
--BESIDES, THIS IS WHERE MY KESAR WILL COME WHEN HE RETURNS. I WILL WAIT HERE FOR HIM.

VERY WELL, DOCTOR. BUT I'M POSTING A GUARD OUTSIDE.

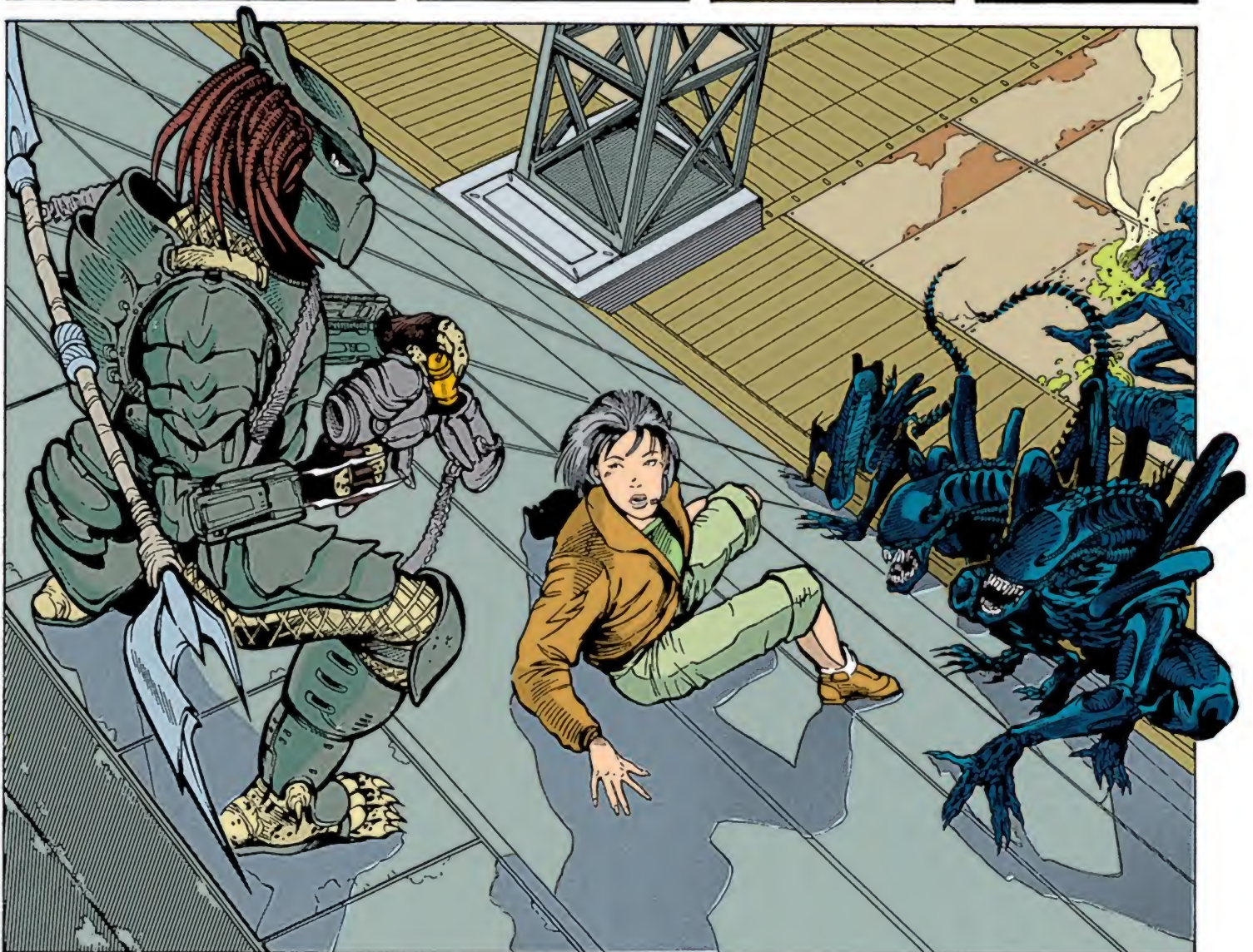
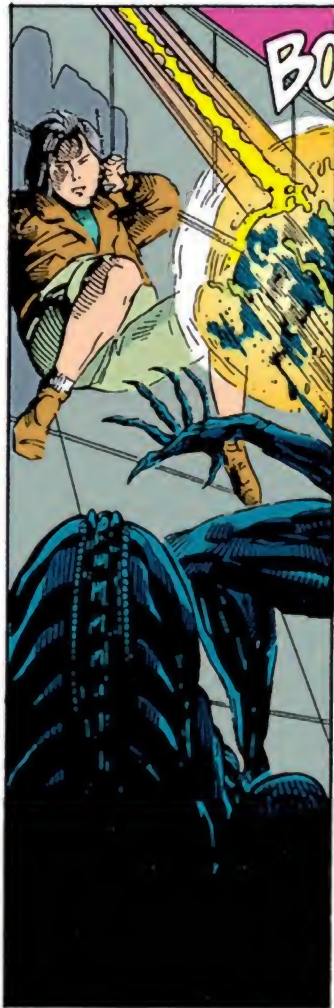
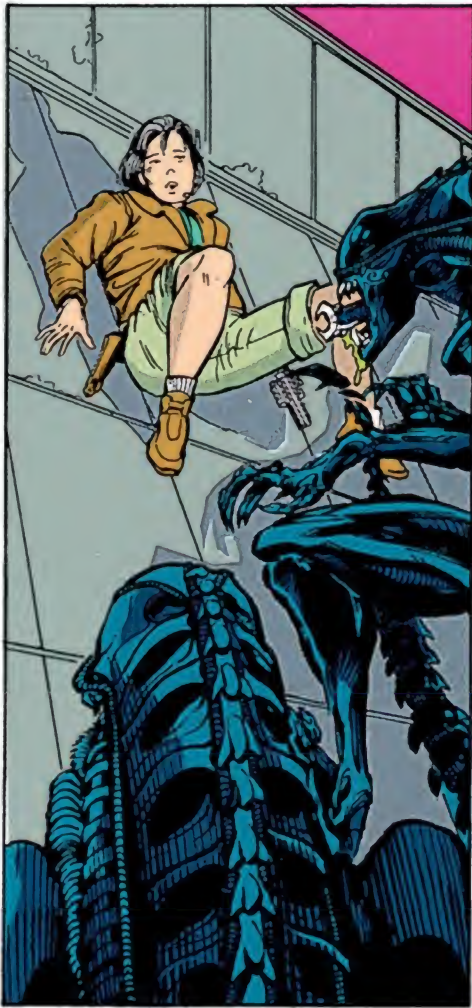
Dr. REVNA WAS FOOLING HERSELF. NO ONE DOUBTED THAT THE DOC HAD MET THE SAME FATE AS THE SHELTONS.



MAYBE WE WERE ALL FOOLING OURSELVES. WE HAD NO WAY OF GUESSING THE ENEMY'S STRENGTH OR INTENTIONS--NO CLUE AS TO ITS TACTICS OR STRATEGIES.









WE'D DONE OUR BEST,
WITH LIMITED PERSONNEL AND
RESOURCES, TO FORTIFY PROS-
PERITY WELLS AGAINST THE
"INVADERS." WE COULD
HAVE SAVED OURSELVES
THE TROUBLE --

-- WE WEREN'T THE
TARGETS OF THE
"INVASION." WE WERE
MERELY **BYSTANDERS**,
CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO
OPPOSING FORCES:



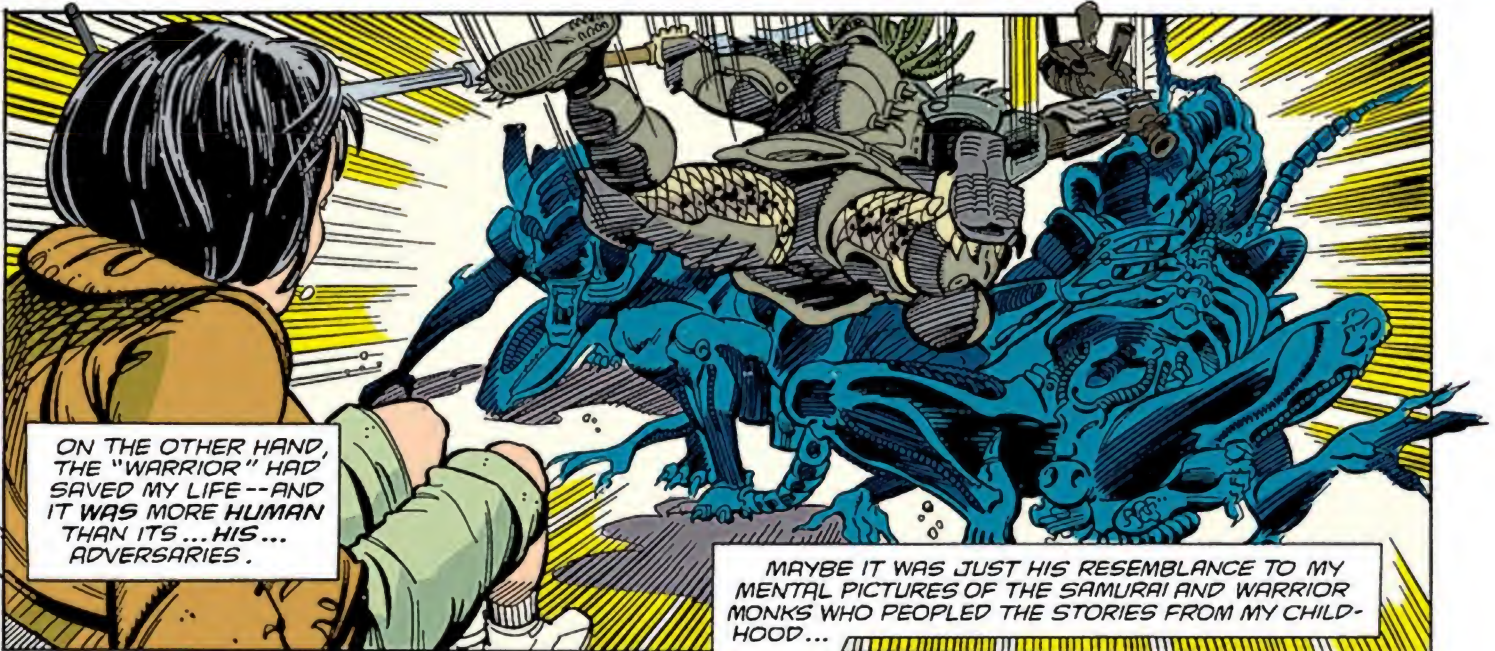
HULKING, HUMANOID
WARRIORS LIKE OUR "PATIENT"
IN THE MED-CENTER --



-- AND THE SILENT, EYELESS
MONSTERS THAT HAUNTED
MY DREAMS.

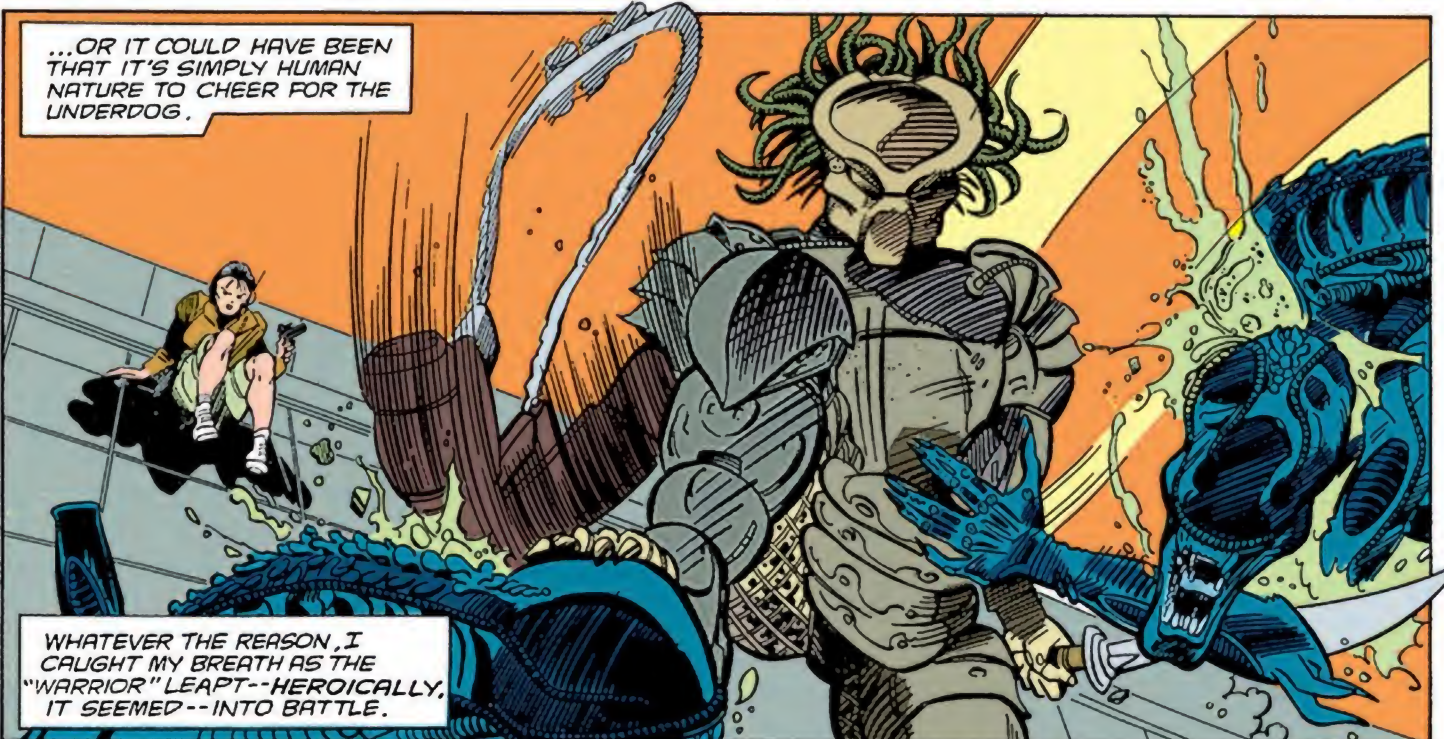


PERHAPS IT WAS THIS CONNECTION TO MY NIGHTMARES--AS WELL AS THE FACT THAT THE MONSTERS HAD KILLED MASON--THAT PREDISPOSED ME AGAINST THEM ...



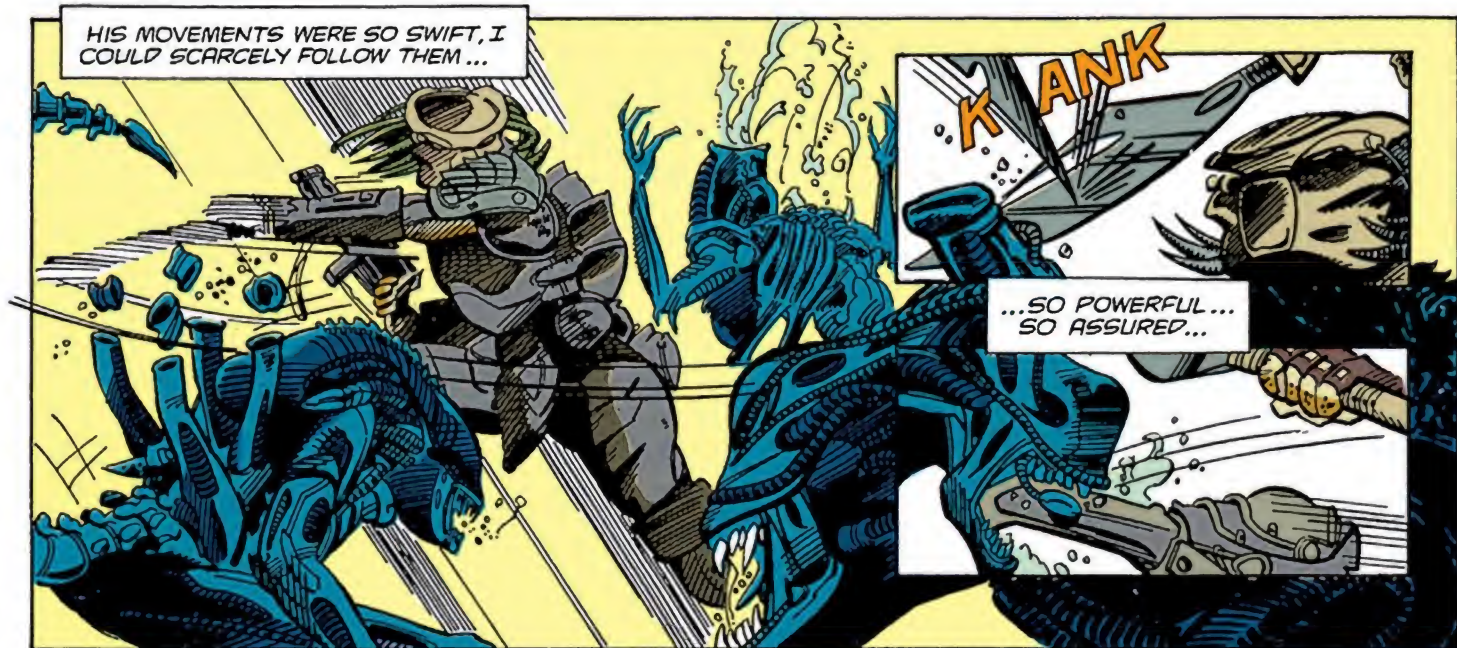
ON THE OTHER HAND, THE "WARRIOR" HAD SAVED MY LIFE--AND IT WAS MORE HUMAN THAN ITS ... HIS ... ADVERSARIES.

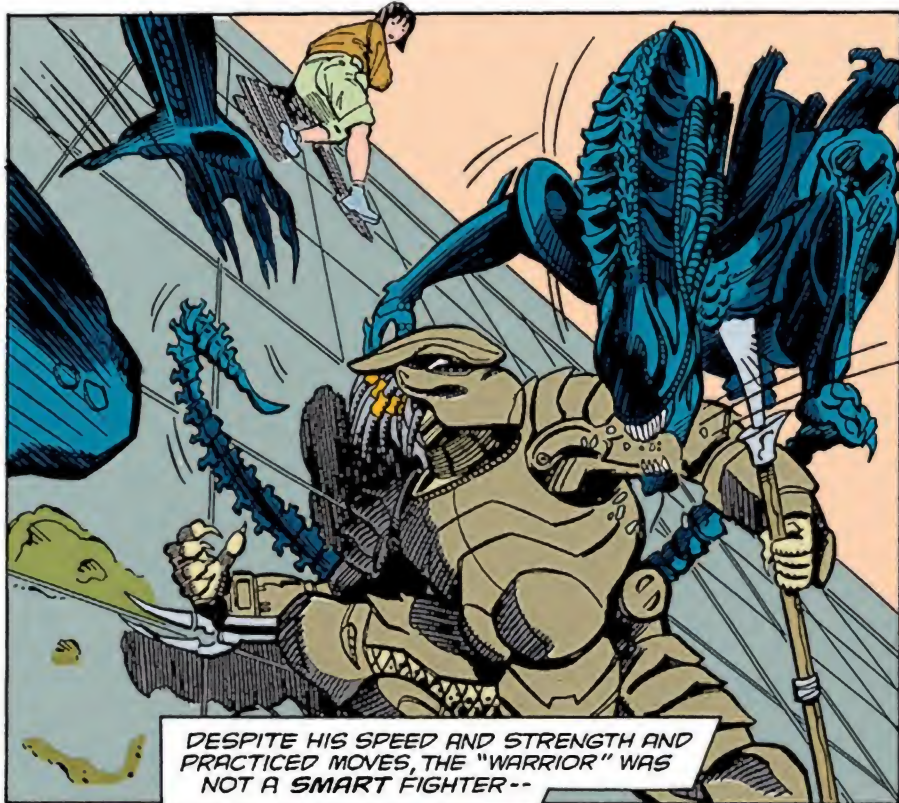
MAYBE IT WAS JUST HIS RESEMBLANCE TO MY MENTAL PICTURES OF THE SAMURAI AND WARRIOR MONKS WHO PEOPLED THE STORIES FROM MY CHILDHOOD ...



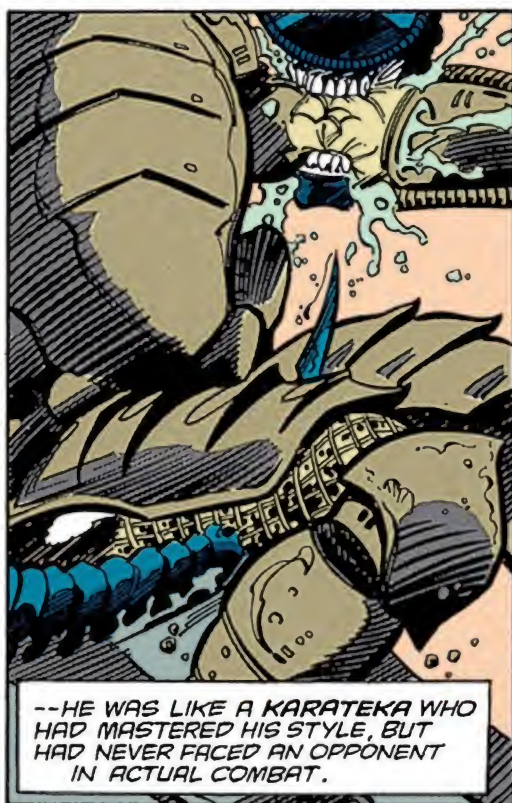
...OR IT COULD HAVE BEEN THAT IT'S SIMPLY HUMAN NATURE TO CHEER FOR THE UNDERDOG.

WHATEVER THE REASON, I CAUGHT MY BREATH AS THE "WARRIOR" LEAPT--HEROICALLY, IT SEEMED--INTO BATTLE.





DESPITE HIS SPEED AND STRENGTH AND PRACTICED MOVES, THE "WARRIOR" WAS NOT A **SMART** FIGHTER--



--HE WAS LIKE A KARATEKA WHO HAD MASTERED HIS STYLE, BUT HAD NEVER FACED AN OPPONENT IN ACTUAL COMBAT.

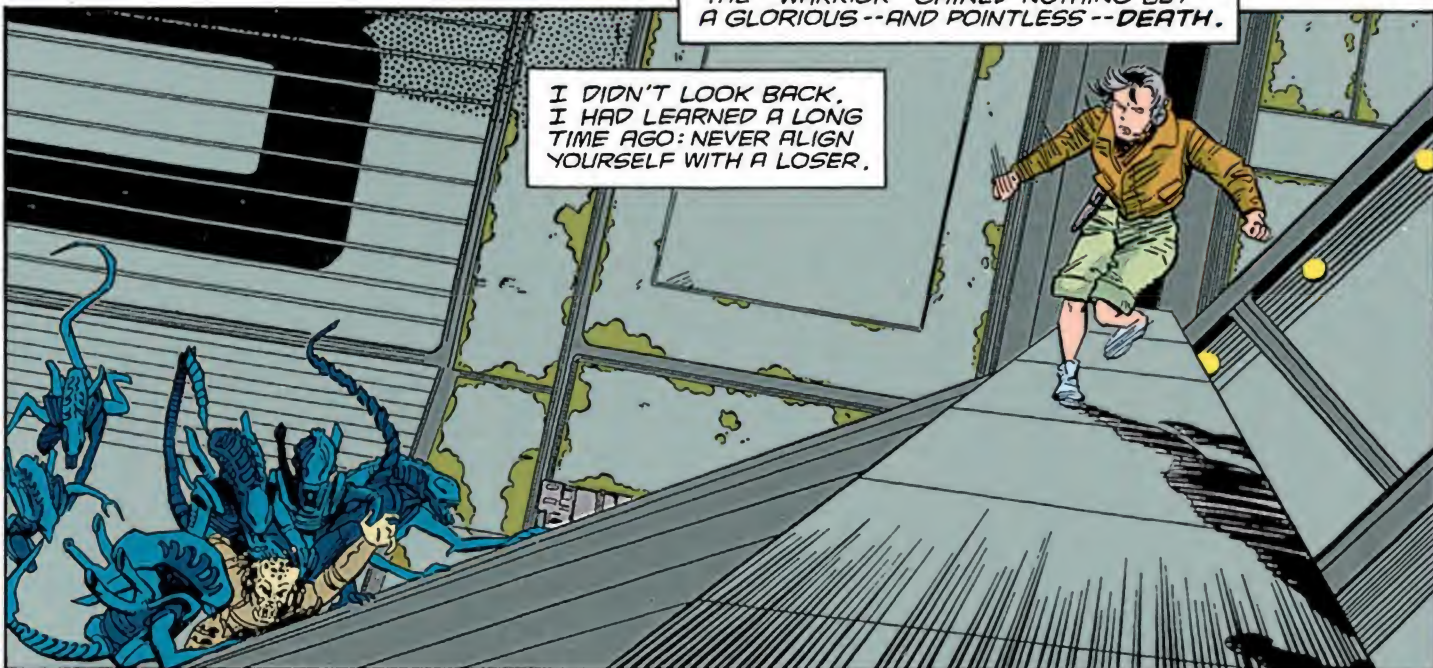


HE HAD NOT CHOSEN A "GOOD" FIGHT...

...NOR HAD HE ALLOWED FOR ANY OUTCOME OTHER THAN VICTORY.



THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEROISM AND STUPIDITY. IN THE END, THE "WARRIOR" GAINED NOTHING BUT A GLORIOUS --AND POINTLESS-- DEATH.



I DIDN'T LOOK BACK. I HAD LEARNED A LONG TIME AGO: NEVER ALIGN YOURSELF WITH A LOSER.





... I WAS LISTENING TO HIROKI'S VOICE ON THE COM, THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE ECHOED THROUGH THE STREETS OF THE COMPLEX, MY HEART WAS POUNDING LIKE THUNDER IN MY CHEST--



--AND, SOMEHOW, I HEARD ANOTHER SOUND... OR A HINT OF A SOUND. NOTHING MORE THAN AN INTAKE OF BREATH.

IT WASN'T MINE-- AND IT CERTAINLY WASN'T RILEY'S.



FAINT THOUGH IT WAS, IT WAS ENOUGH.



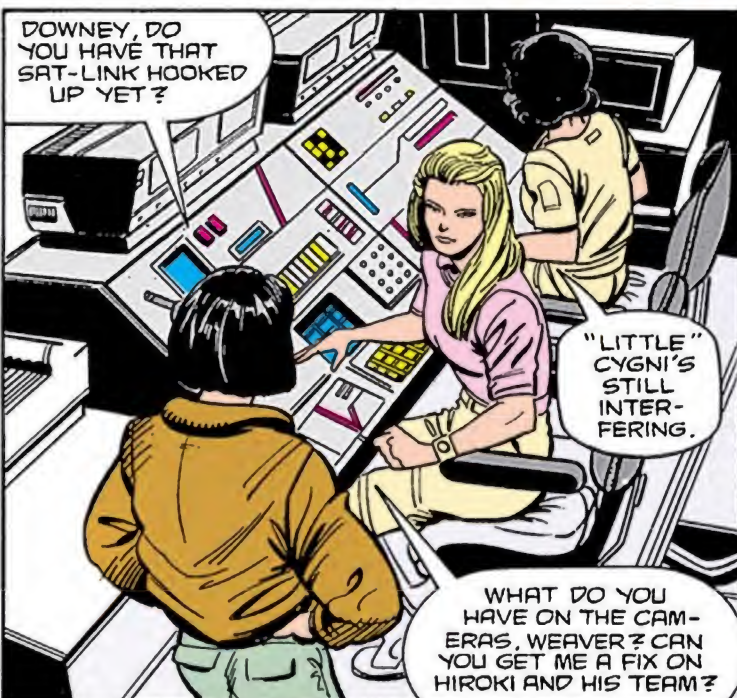
CHUKK



INVISIBILITY. THAT'S HOW THE "WARRIORS" HAD GOTTEN PAST OUR DEFENSES.



BUT INVISIBILITY HAS LITTLE MEANING TO CREATURES WITH NO EYES.







HIROKI AND HIS TEAM HAD GONE OUT AS HEROES. THEY'D SACRIFICED THEMSELVES FOR THE REST OF THE COLONY, BUT I HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR SACRIFICE.

I HAD SQUANDERED THE TIME THEY'D BOUGHT US. I HAD FAILED THE COLONY... AND I HAD FAILED HIROKI.



MS. NOGUCHI? THIS IS WEAVER. I-- I KNOW YOU AND MR. SHIMURA WERE FRIENDS. I DON'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT YOU, BUT...



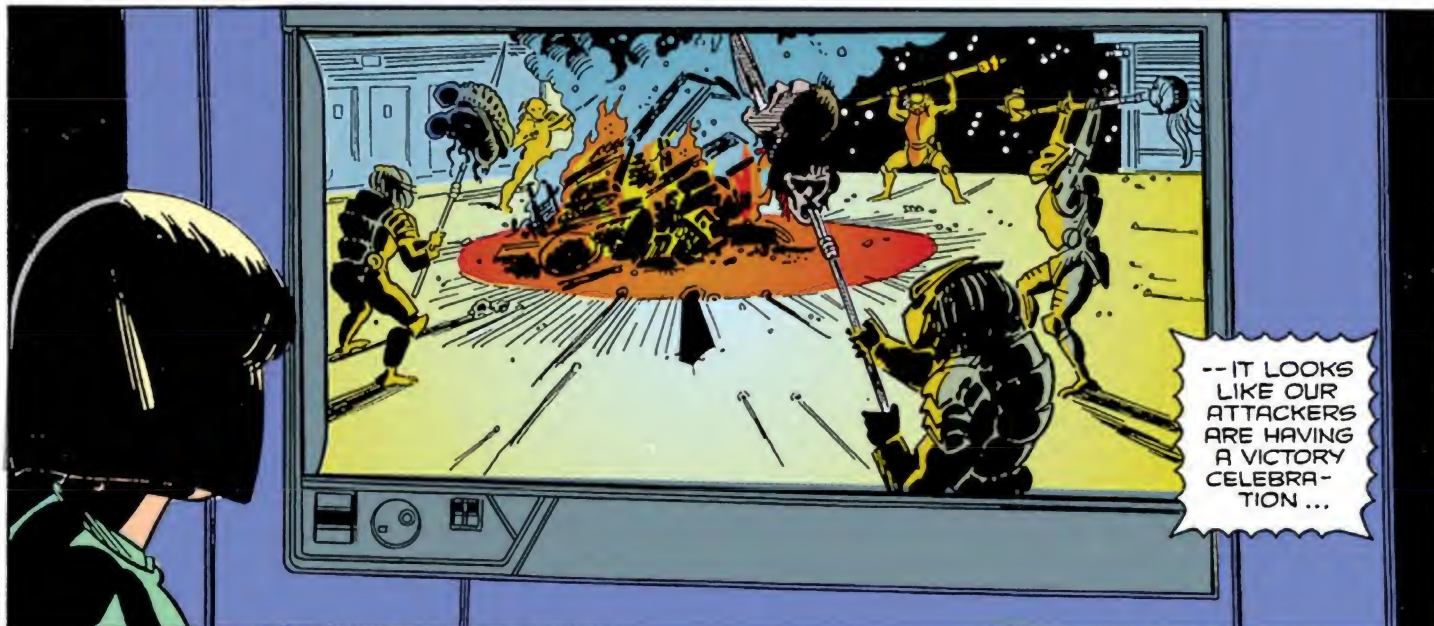
WHAT IS IT, WEAVER?

THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD SEE. I CAN TRANSFER IT TO YOUR SCREEN...



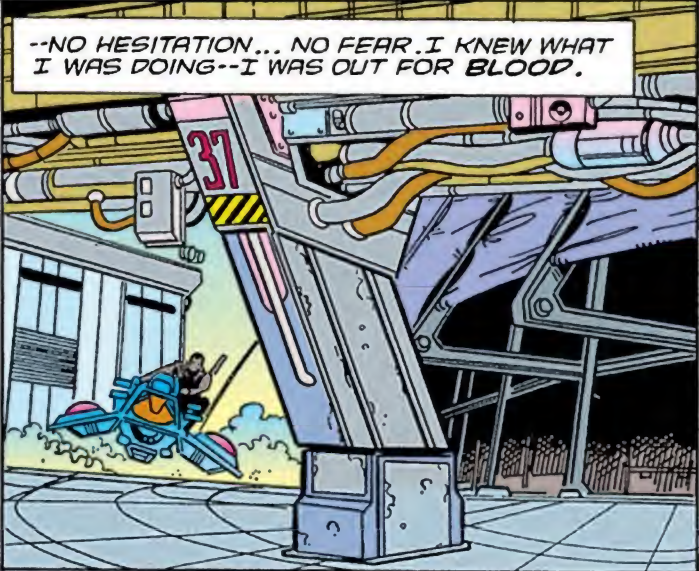
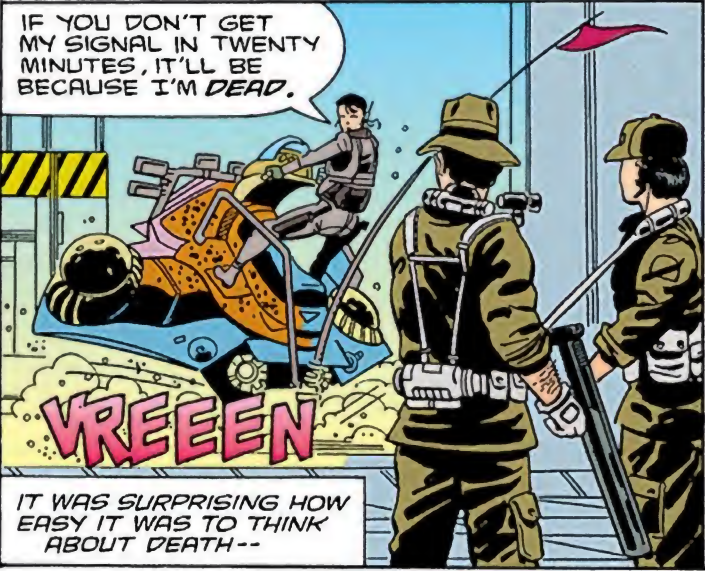
THIS IS THE FEED FROM THE SECURITY CAMERA ON THE SOUTHWEST SIDE OF THE TOWER. I'VE BOOSTED THE GAIN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE--

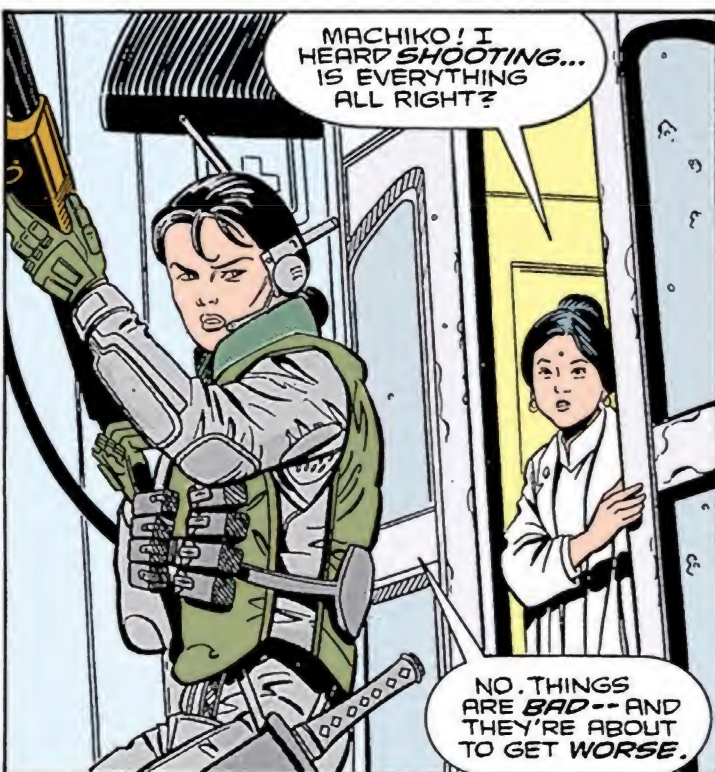
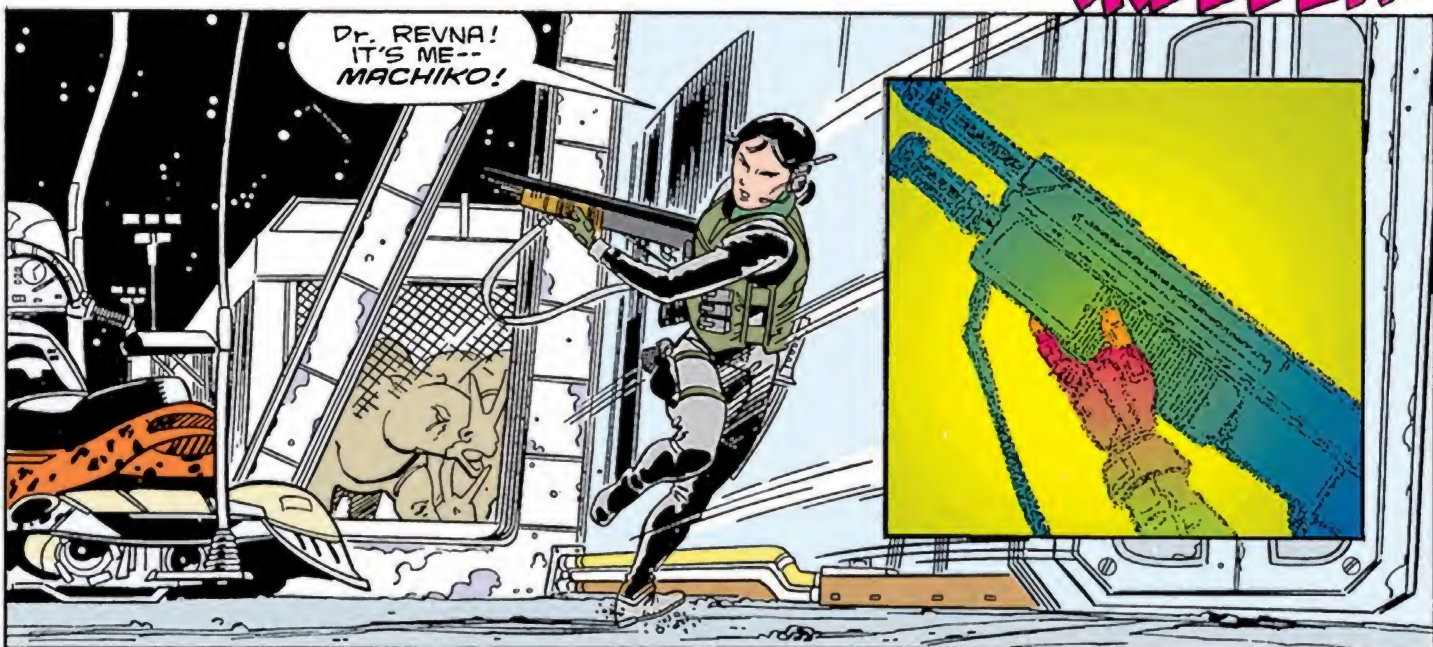
--BUT THE PICTURE'S STILL DARK. A LOT OF THE LIGHTS SEEM TO BE OUT IN THAT SECTION OF THE COMPOUND--



--IT LOOKS LIKE OUR ATTACKERS ARE HAVING A VICTORY CELEBRATION...









IT'S A SEMI-AUTOMATIC, SO IT DOES ALL THE WORK **FOR** YOU. JUST AIM IT AT THE BELLY OF WHOEVER YOU WANT TO SHOOT -- AND SQUEEZE THE TRIGGER.

YOU ONLY HAVE SIX ROUNDS-- DON'T WASTE ANY ON WARNING SHOTS.

Ms. NOGUCHI-- I AM NOT A SOLDIER ...



THIS ISN'T A WAR, MIRIAM. THIS IS **SURVIVAL**.

W-WHO MIGHT I BE SHOOTING AT?



DON'T WORRY-- YOU'LL KNOW WHEN THE TIME COMES.



TELL ME, MIRIAM, THE UNCLASSIFIEDS ROTH BROUGHT YOU-- KESAR'S REPORT SAID HE THOUGHT THEY MIGHT TRANSMIT EGGS, OR SPORES, TO HOST BODIES.

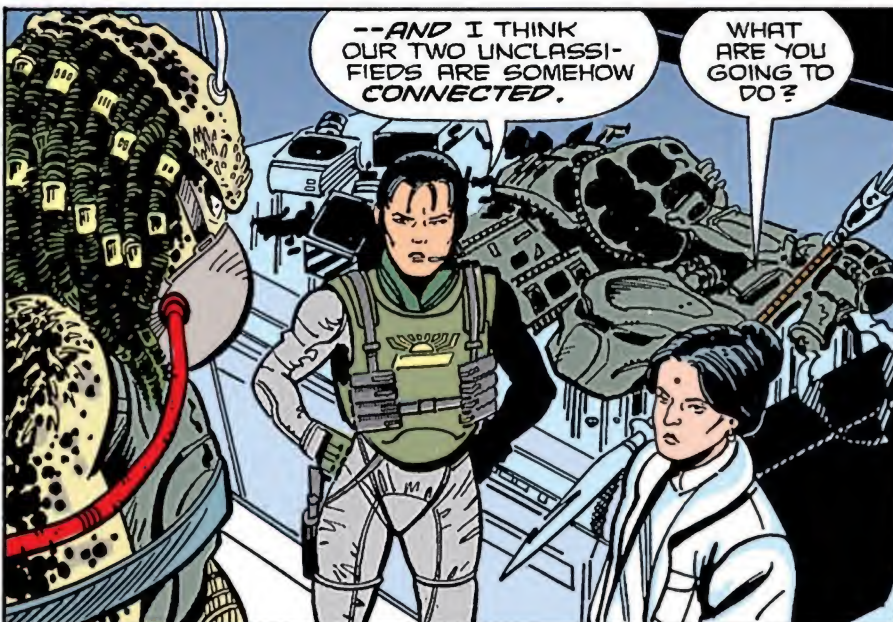
IS IT POSSIBLE THAT WHEN THOSE SPORES GREW UP, THEY'D LOOK LIKE THIS?



IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY. WHY DO YOU ASK?

BECAUSE I'VE SEEN SOME OF **THESE** THINGS TONIGHT. THERE WERE DOZENS-- MAYBE **HUNDREDS**-- OF THEM IN THE LECTOR.

I THINK ACKLAND'S RHYNT WERE INFECTED, OR **IMPREGNATED**, BY THESE THINGS, AND THEY'VE SPREAD IT TO ALL OF THE HERDS ON THE SHIP--



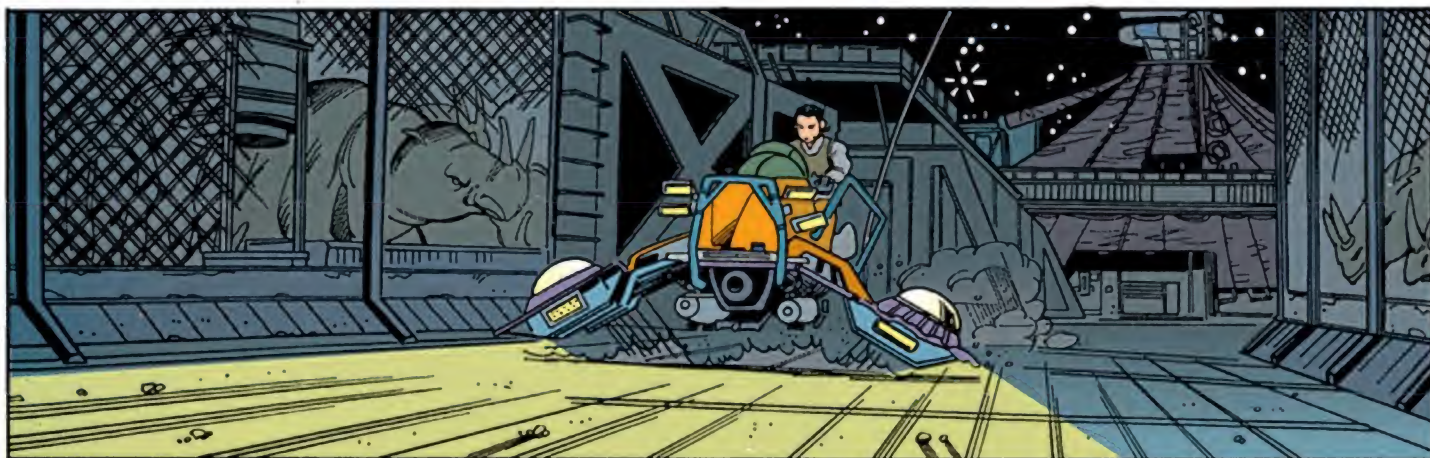
--AND I THINK OUR TWO UNCLASSIFIEDS ARE SOMEHOW **CONNECTED**.

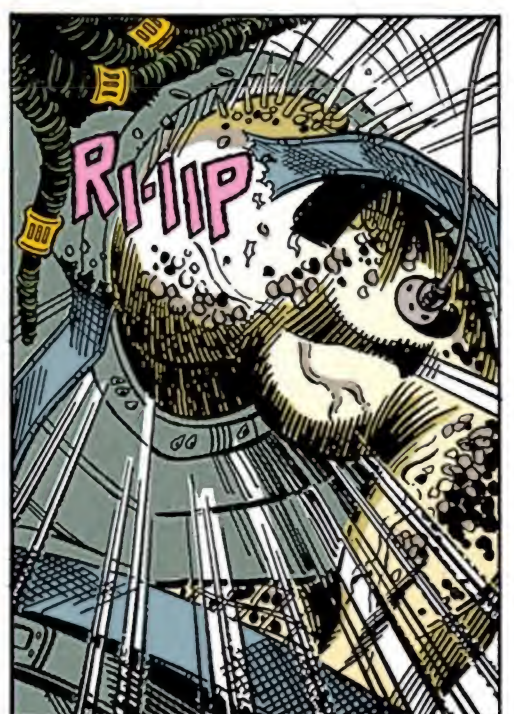
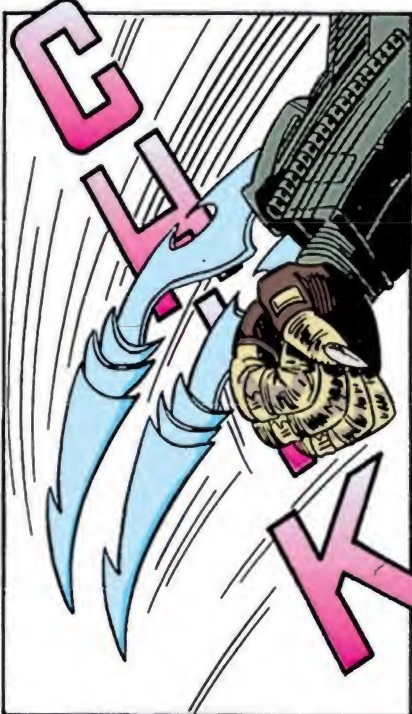
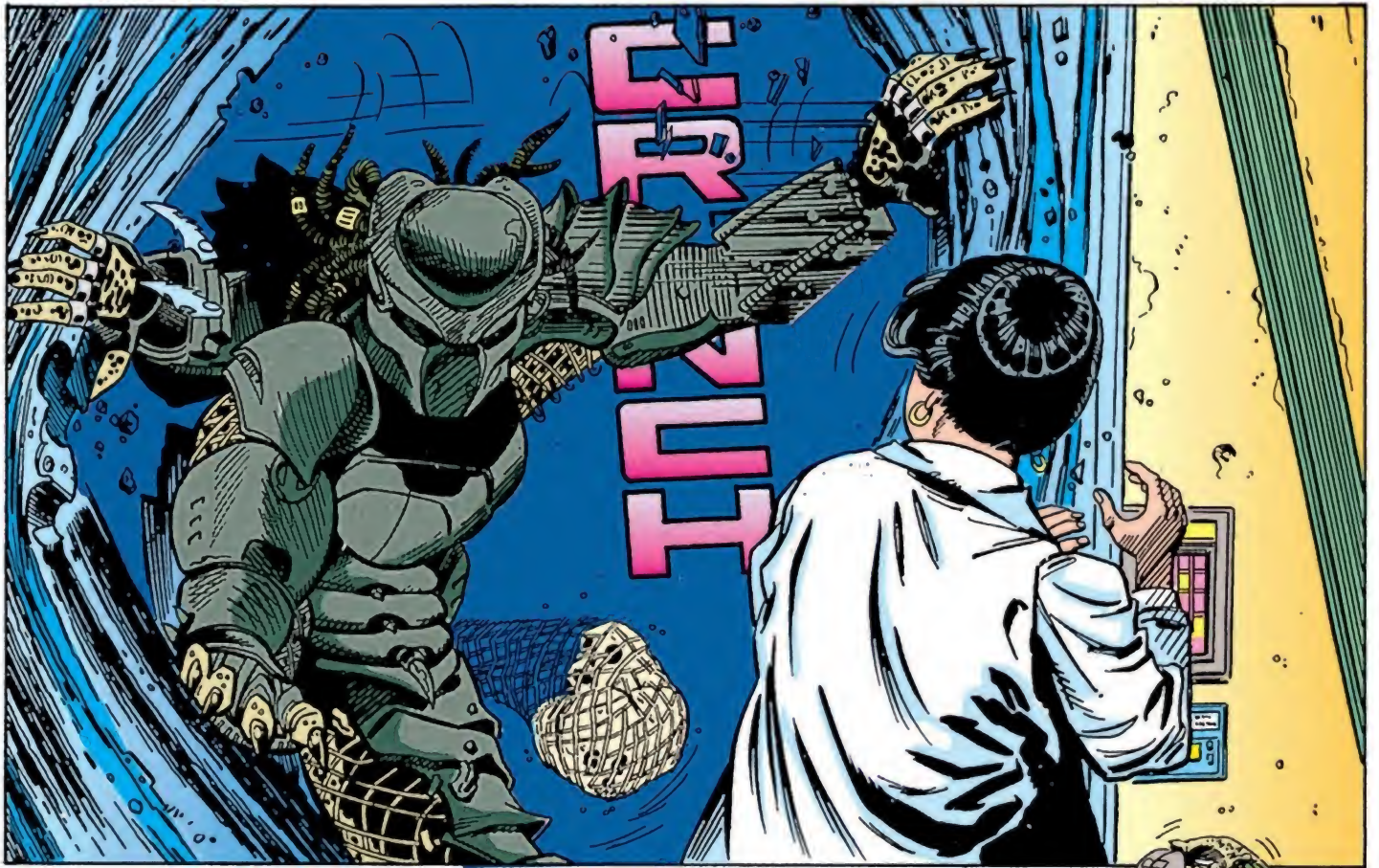
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

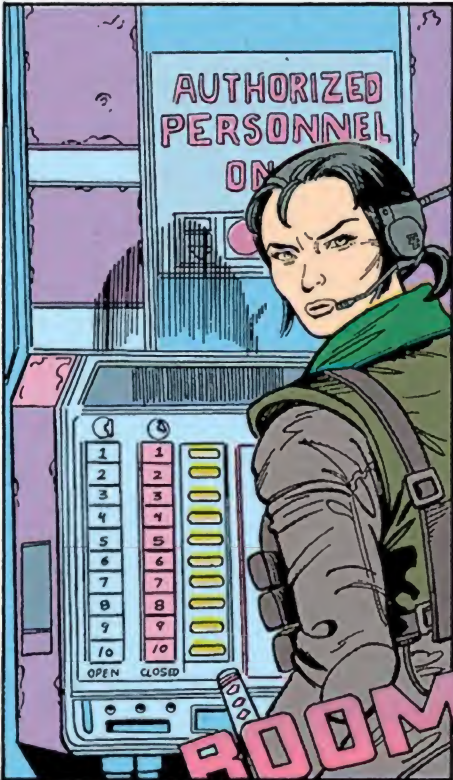
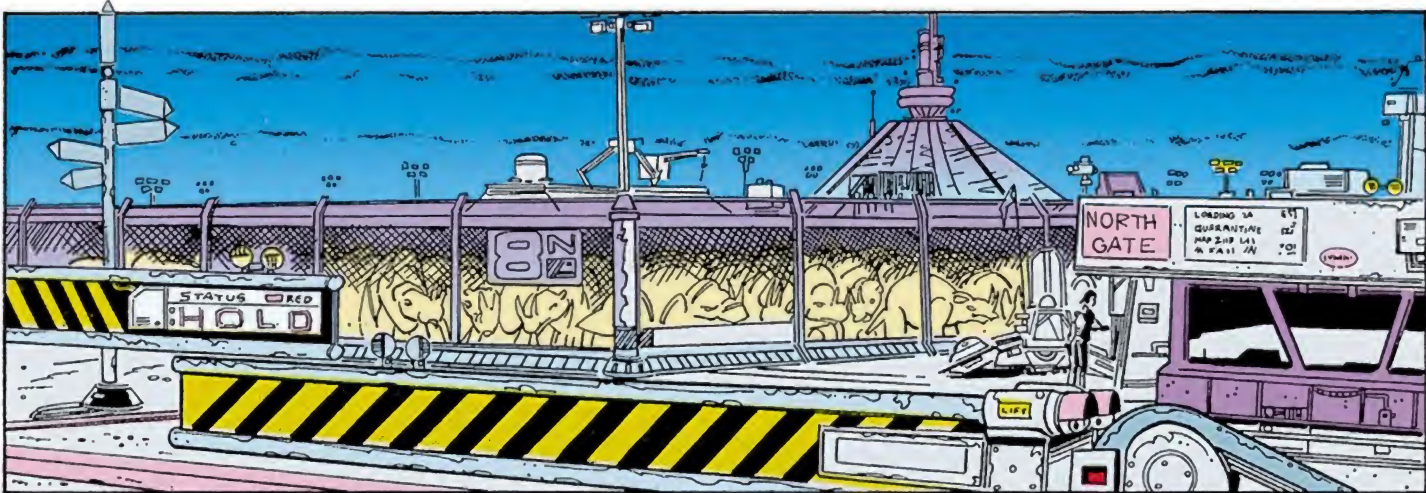


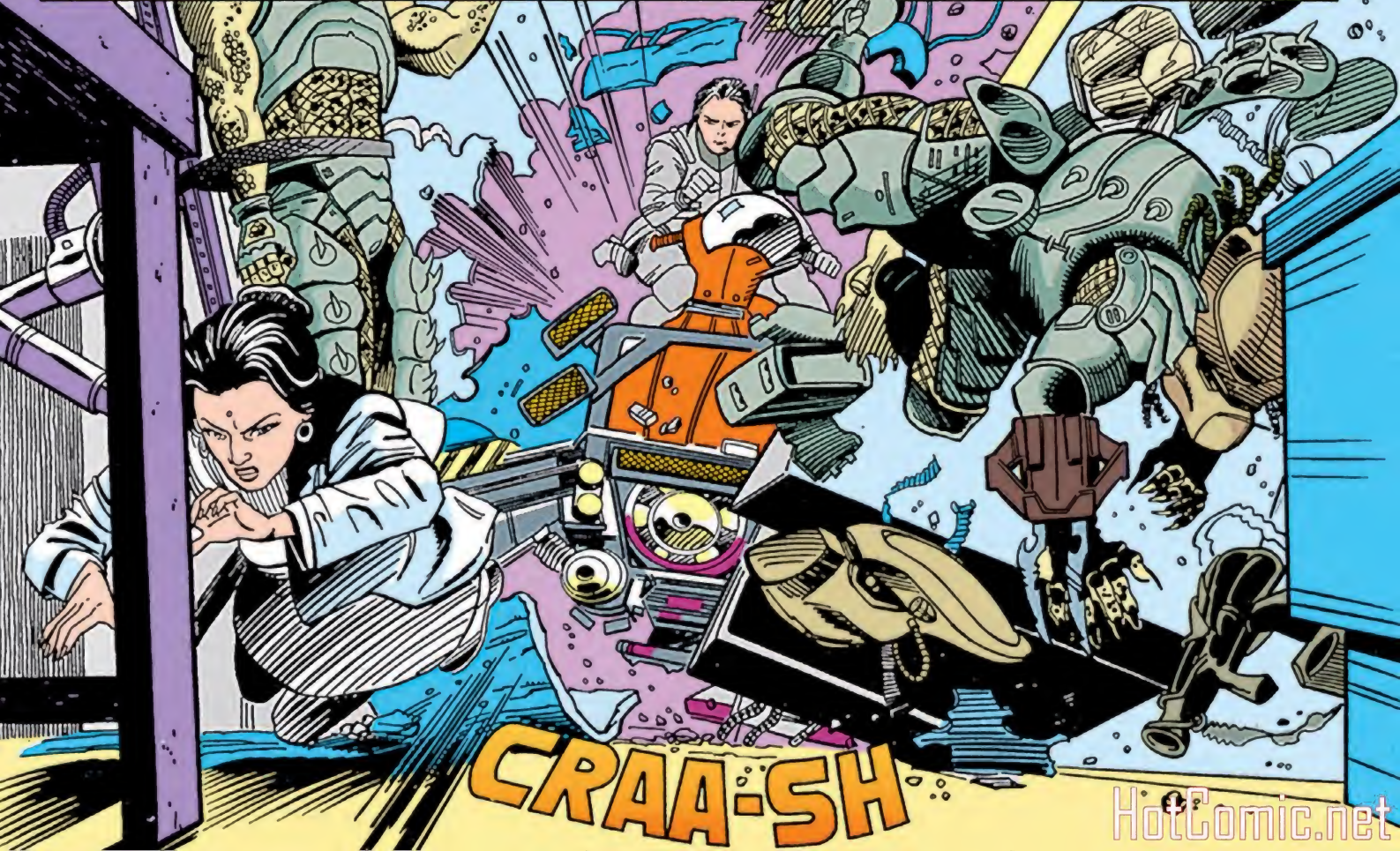
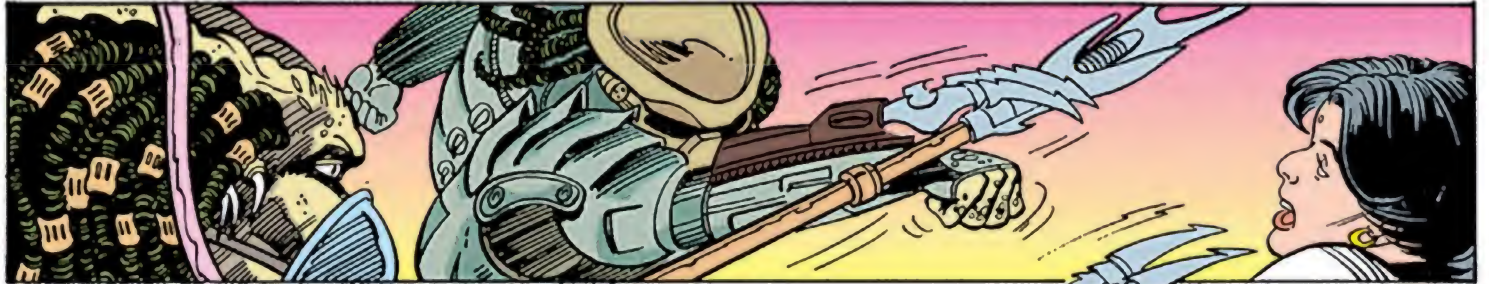
YOU KNOW RHYNT TEMPERAMENT, RIGHT? I'VE GOT THREE THOUSAND HEAD THAT HAVE BEEN CRAMMED INTO HOLDING PENS SINCE LAST NIGHT--

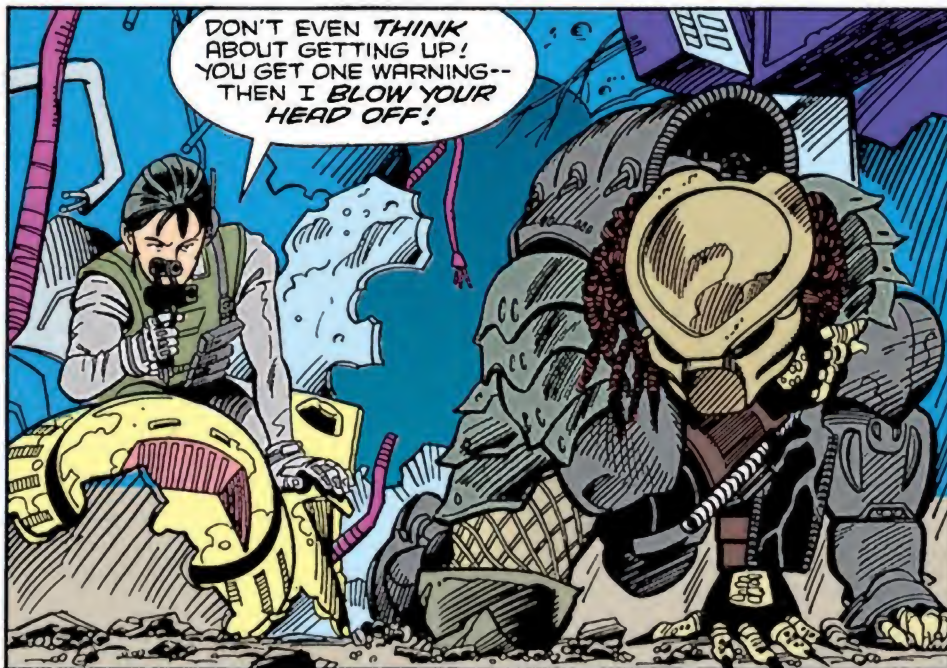
--WHAT KIND OF MOOD DO YOU THINK THEY'RE IN **RIGHT NOW**?

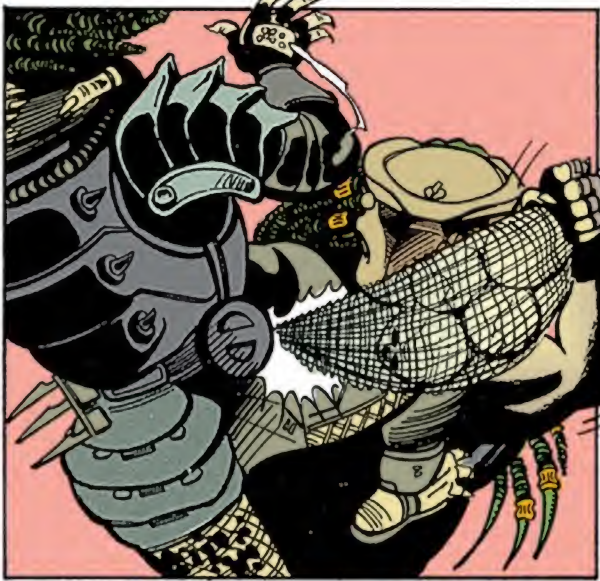


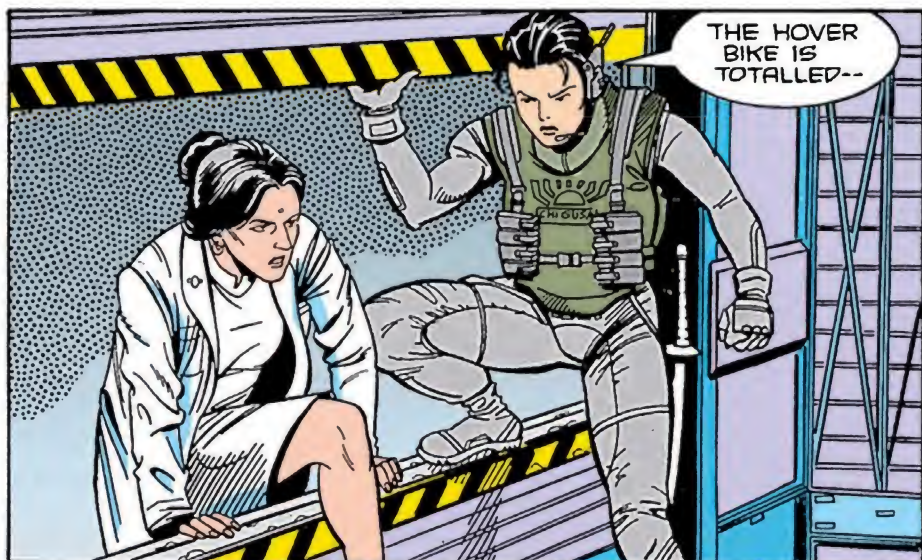








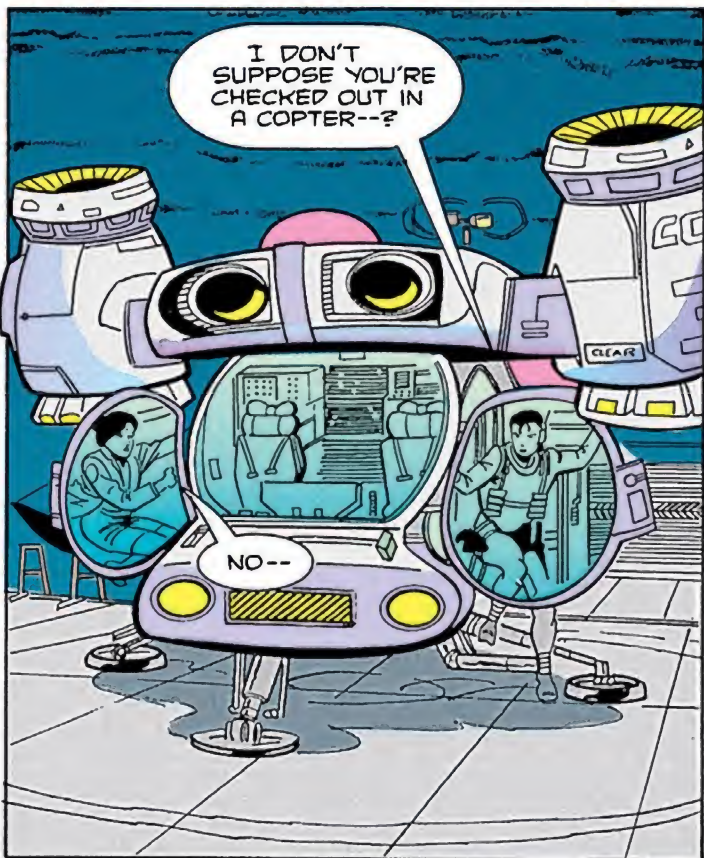




THE HOVER BIKE IS TOTALLED--



-- WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE THE COPTER.



I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'RE CHECKED OUT IN A COPTER--?

NO--



-- I ALWAYS RELIED ON KESAR ...

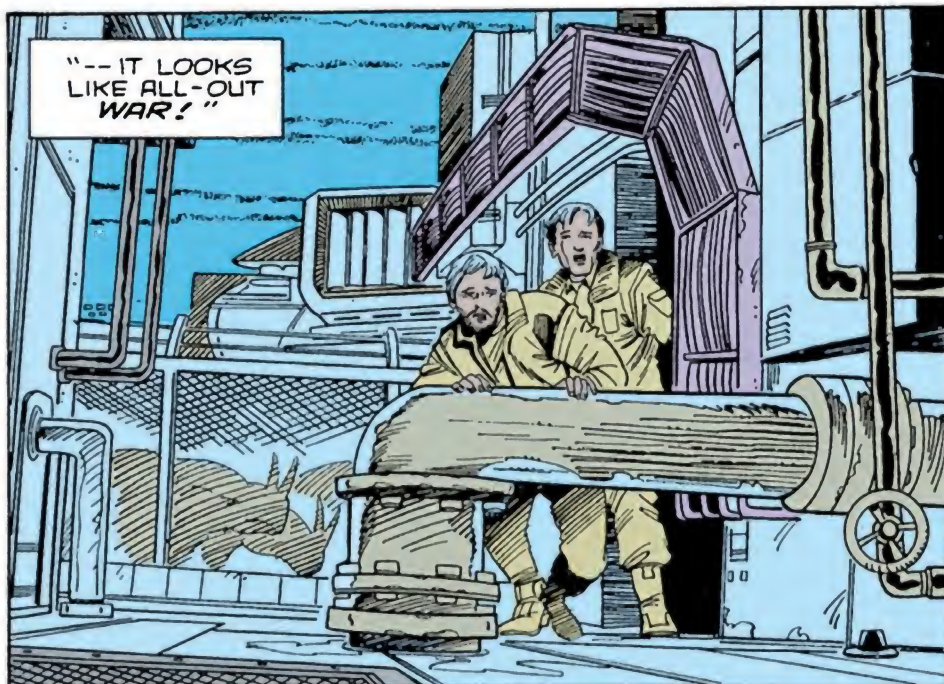


YEAH, ME NEITHER. THIS SHOULD BE INTERESTING.

THIS IS NOGUCHI IN COPTER-1-- DO YOU READ ME, TOWER? WHAT'S THE SITUATION THERE?



I READ YOU, COPTER-1. WE'RE ALMOST READY-- BUT YOU SHOULD SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SOUTHWEST QUADRANT--



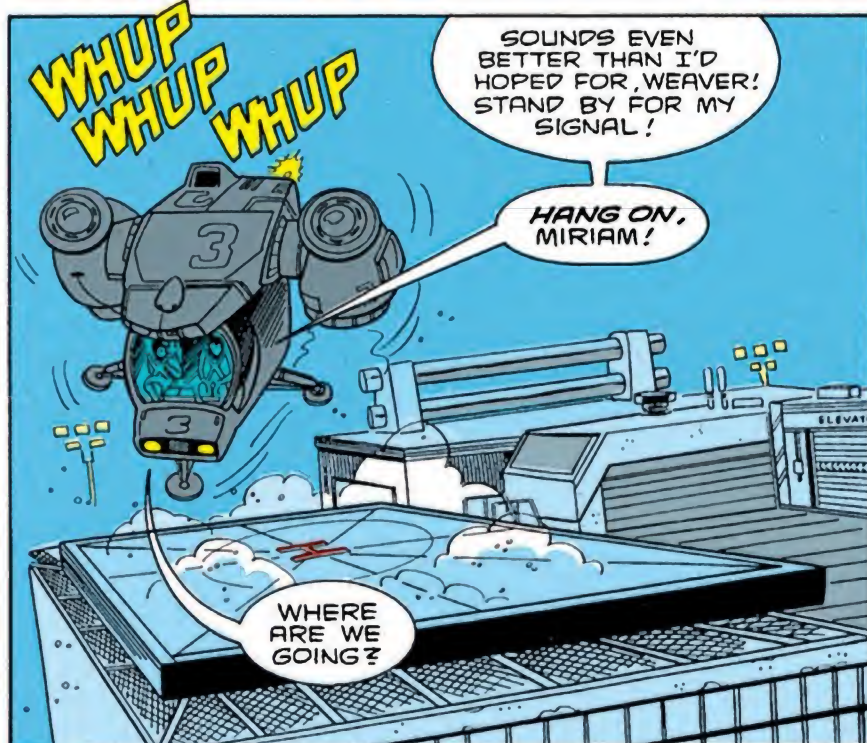
"-- IT LOOKS LIKE ALL-OUT WAR!"



AW, CHRIST! WE WERE BETTER OFF IN THE SHIP!



OH... MY... GOD...

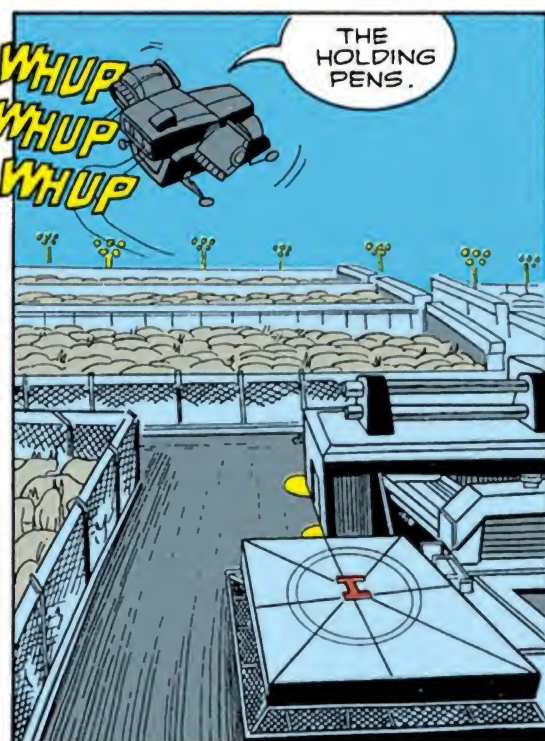


WHUP WHUP WHUP

SOUNDS EVEN BETTER THAN I'D HOPED FOR, WEAVER! STAND BY FOR MY SIGNAL!

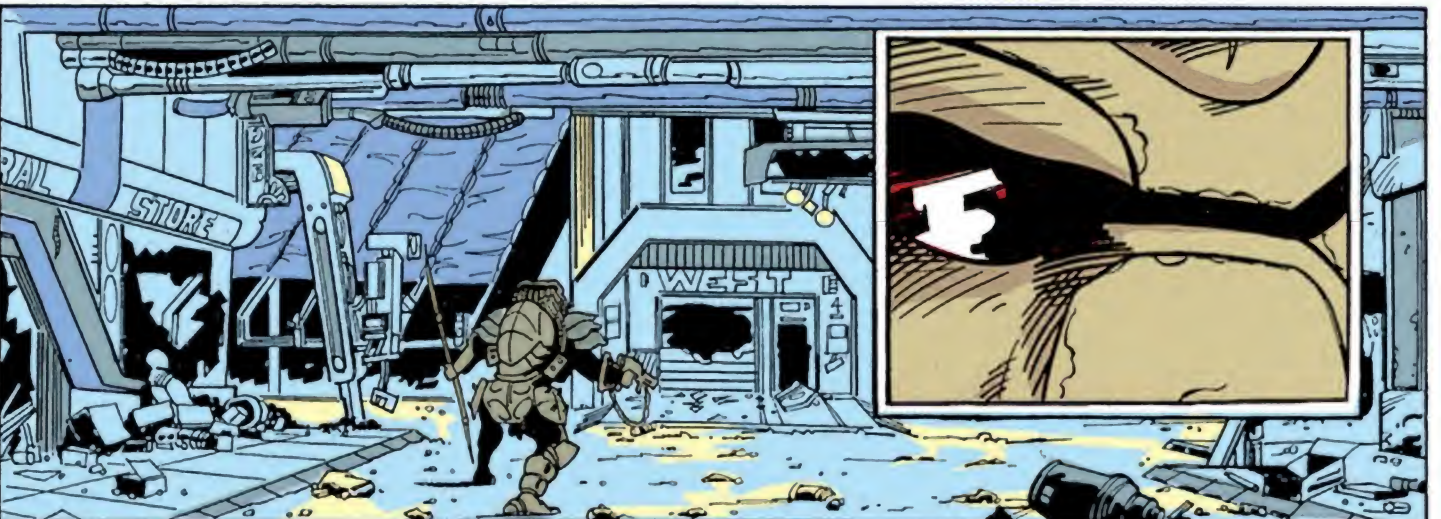
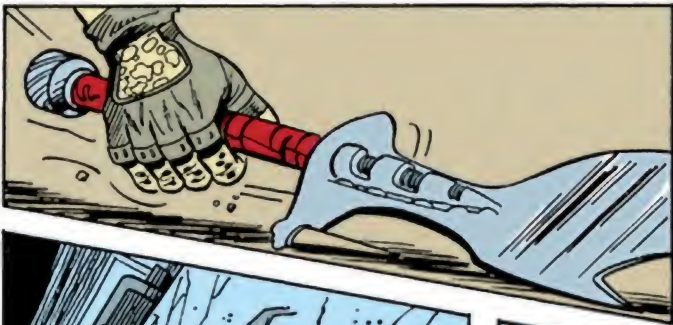
HANG ON, MIRIAM!

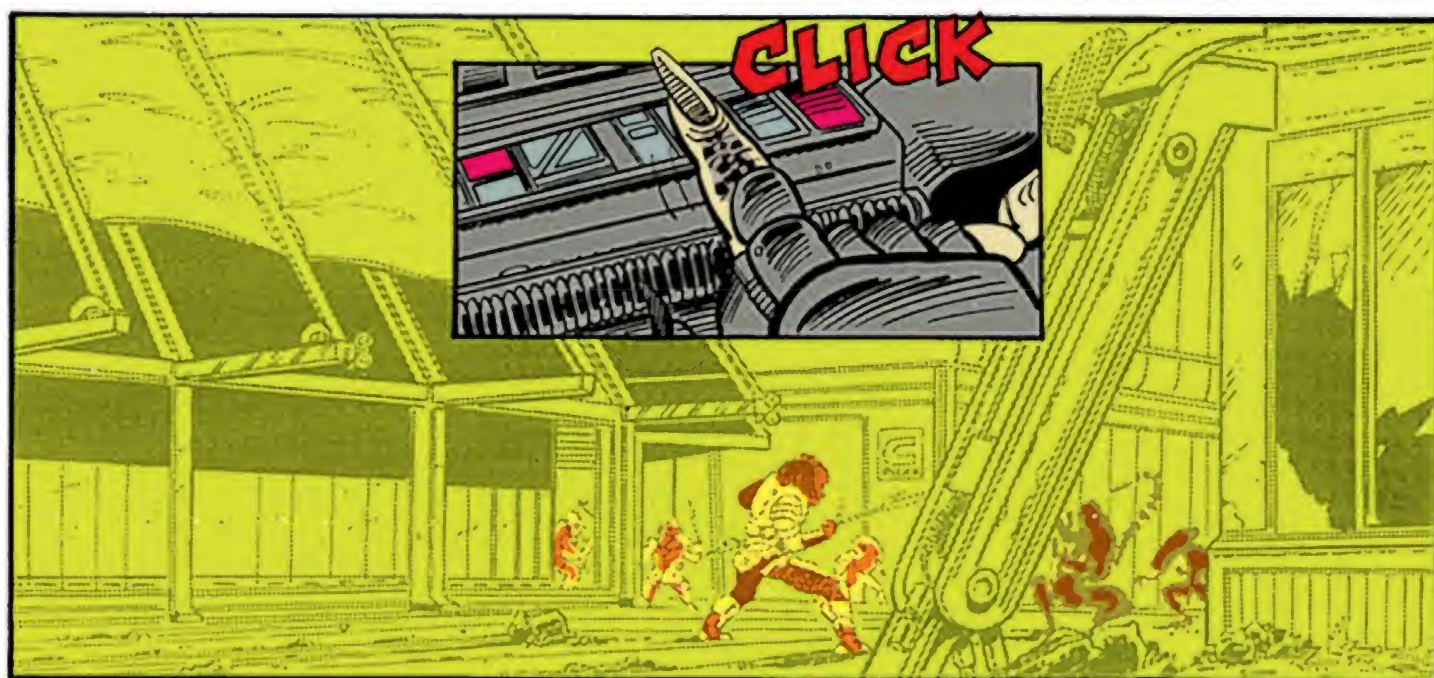
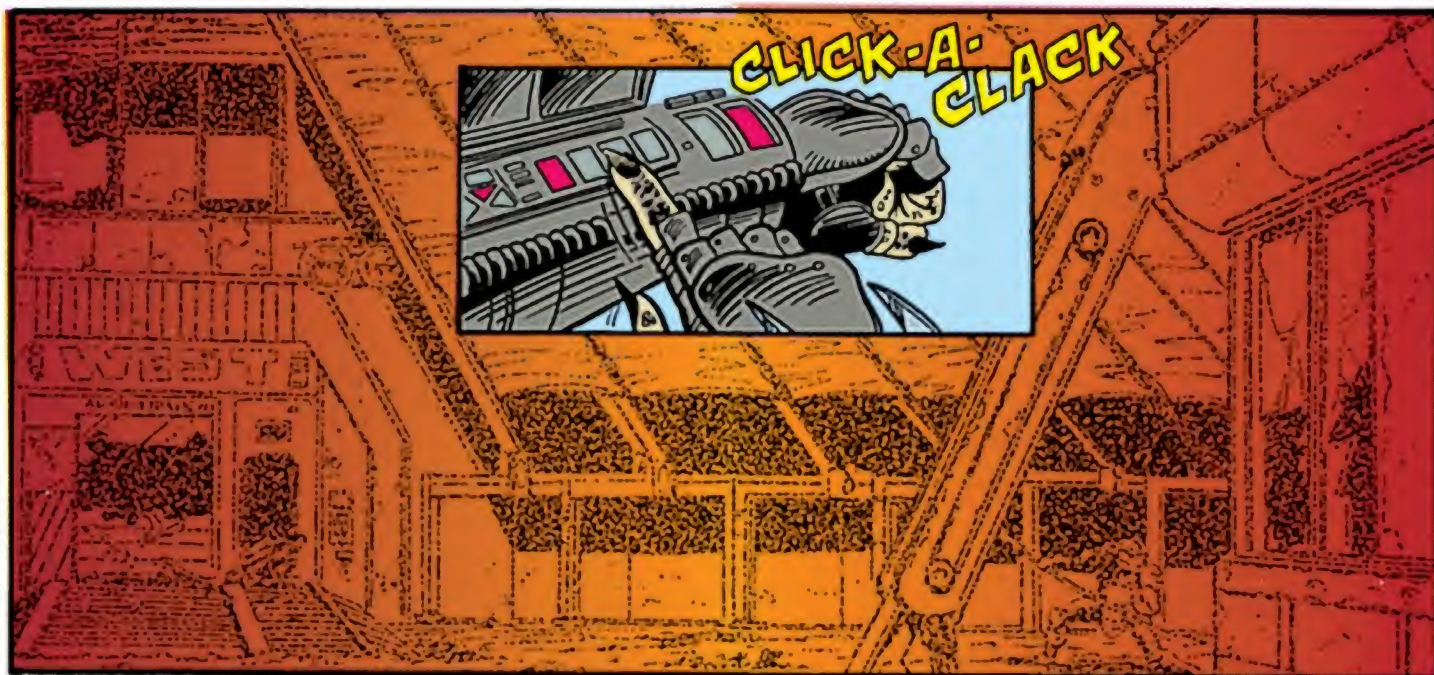
WHERE ARE WE GOING?

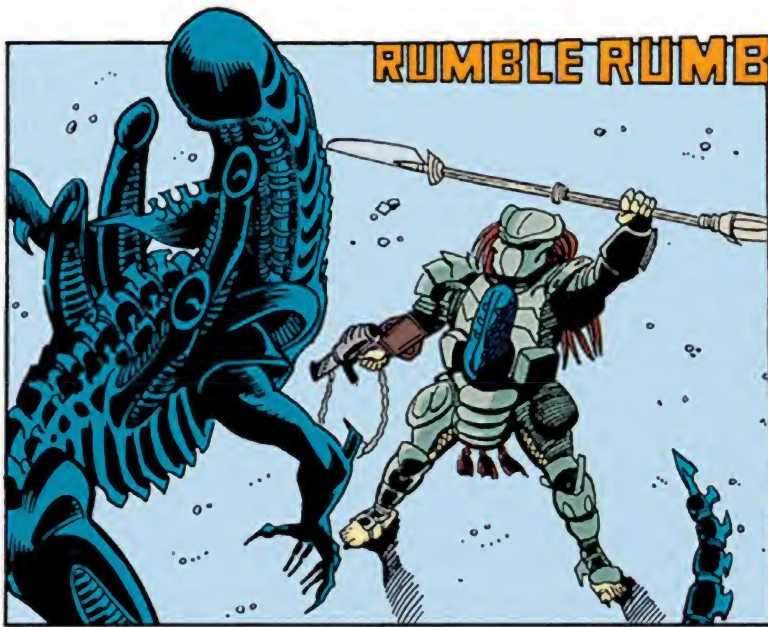


WHUP WHUP WHUP

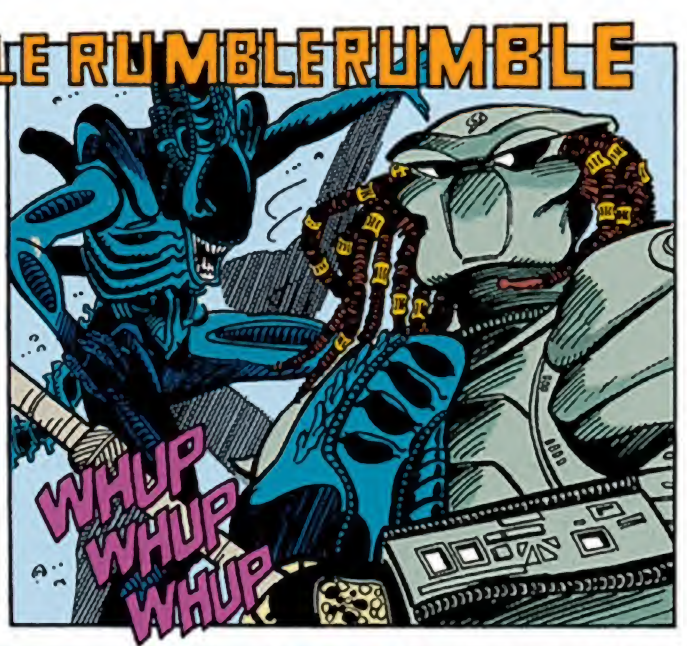
THE HOLDING PENS.





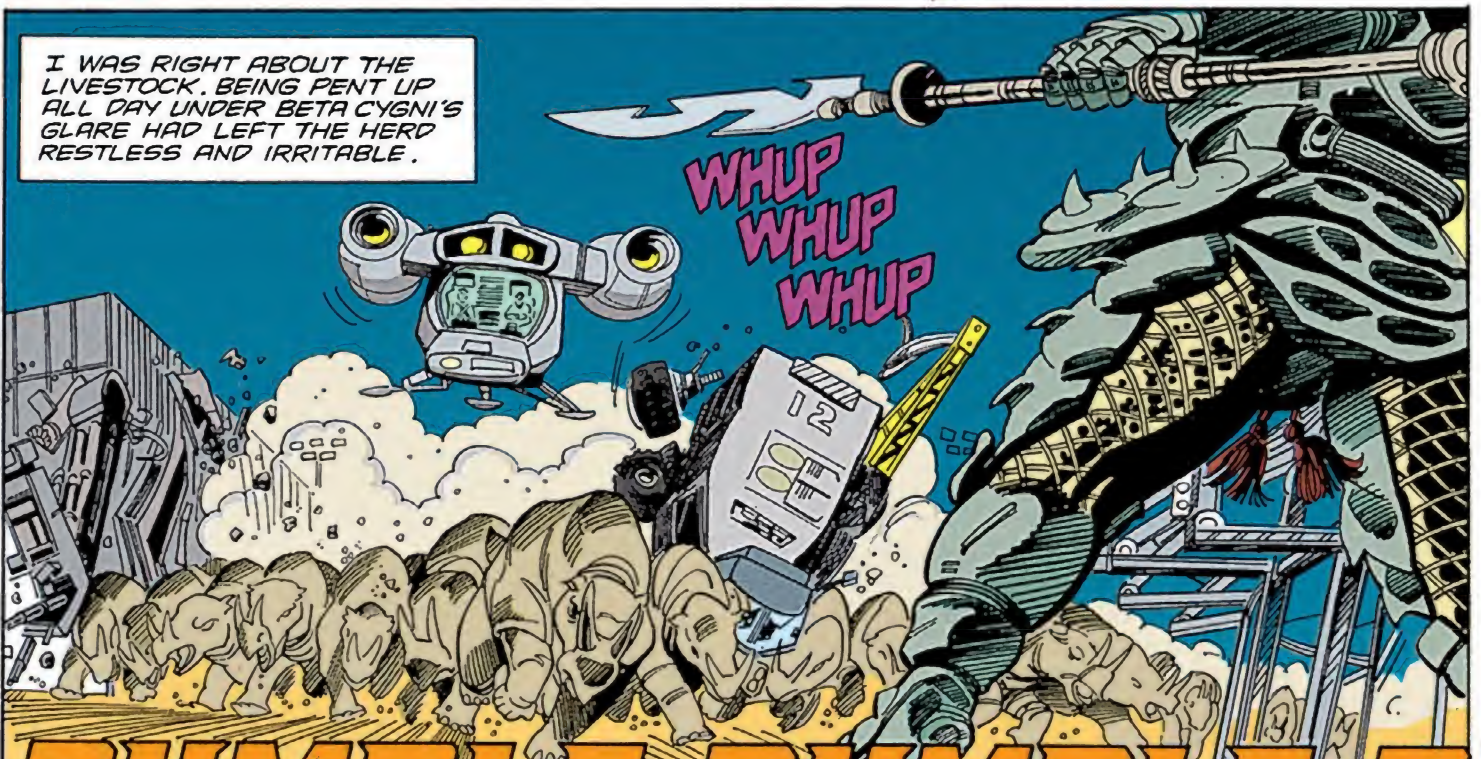


RUMBLE RUMBLE RUMBLERUMBLE



WHUP
WHUP
WHUP

I WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE LIVESTOCK. BEING PENT UP ALL DAY UNDER BETA CYGNI'S GLARE HAD LEFT THE HERD RESTLESS AND IRRITABLE.

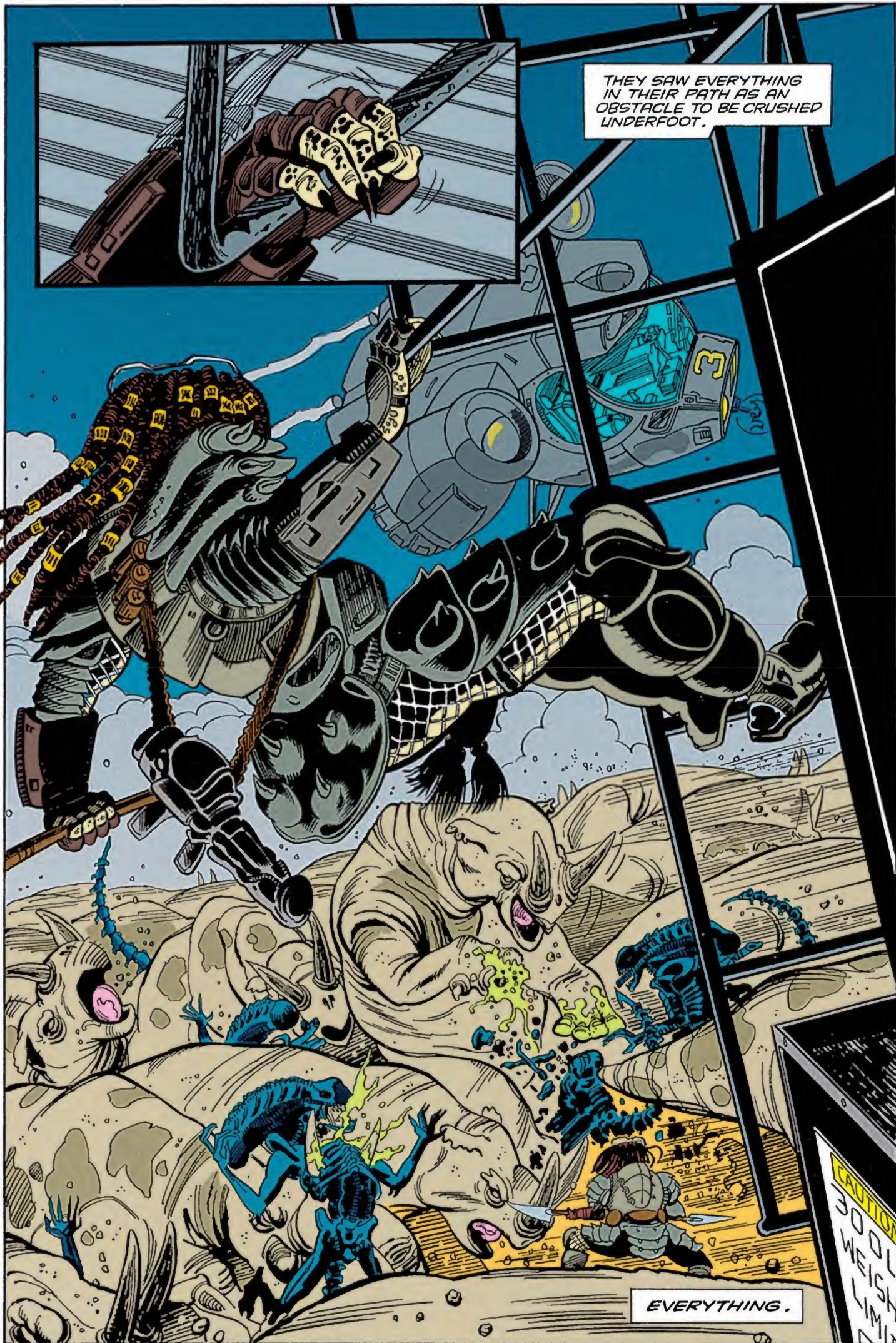


WHUP
WHUP
WHUP

RUMBLE RUMBLE RU

NOW, SPURRED ON BY THE LOW-FLYING COPTER, THEY PURSUED A STRAIGHT-LINE COURSE FOR FREEDOM.

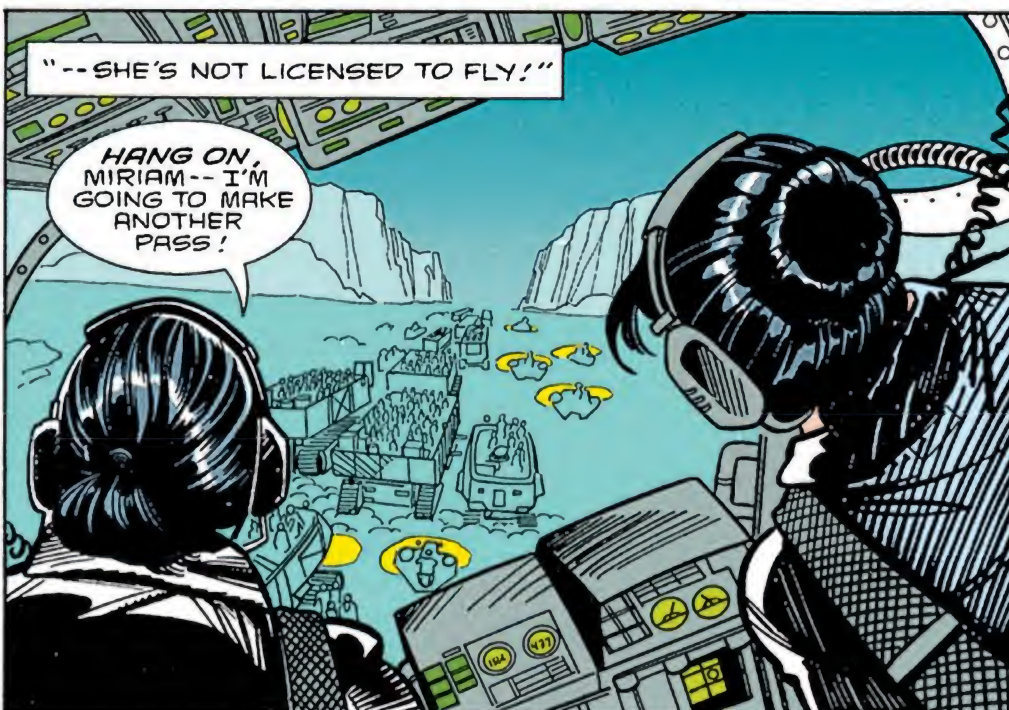
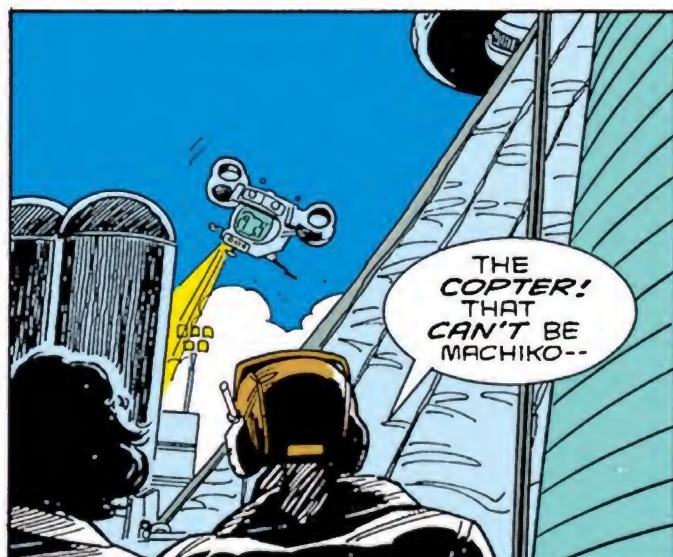
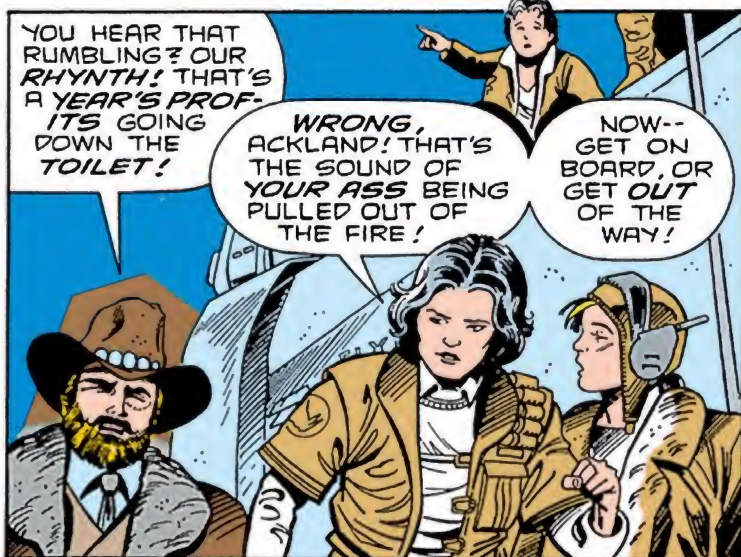
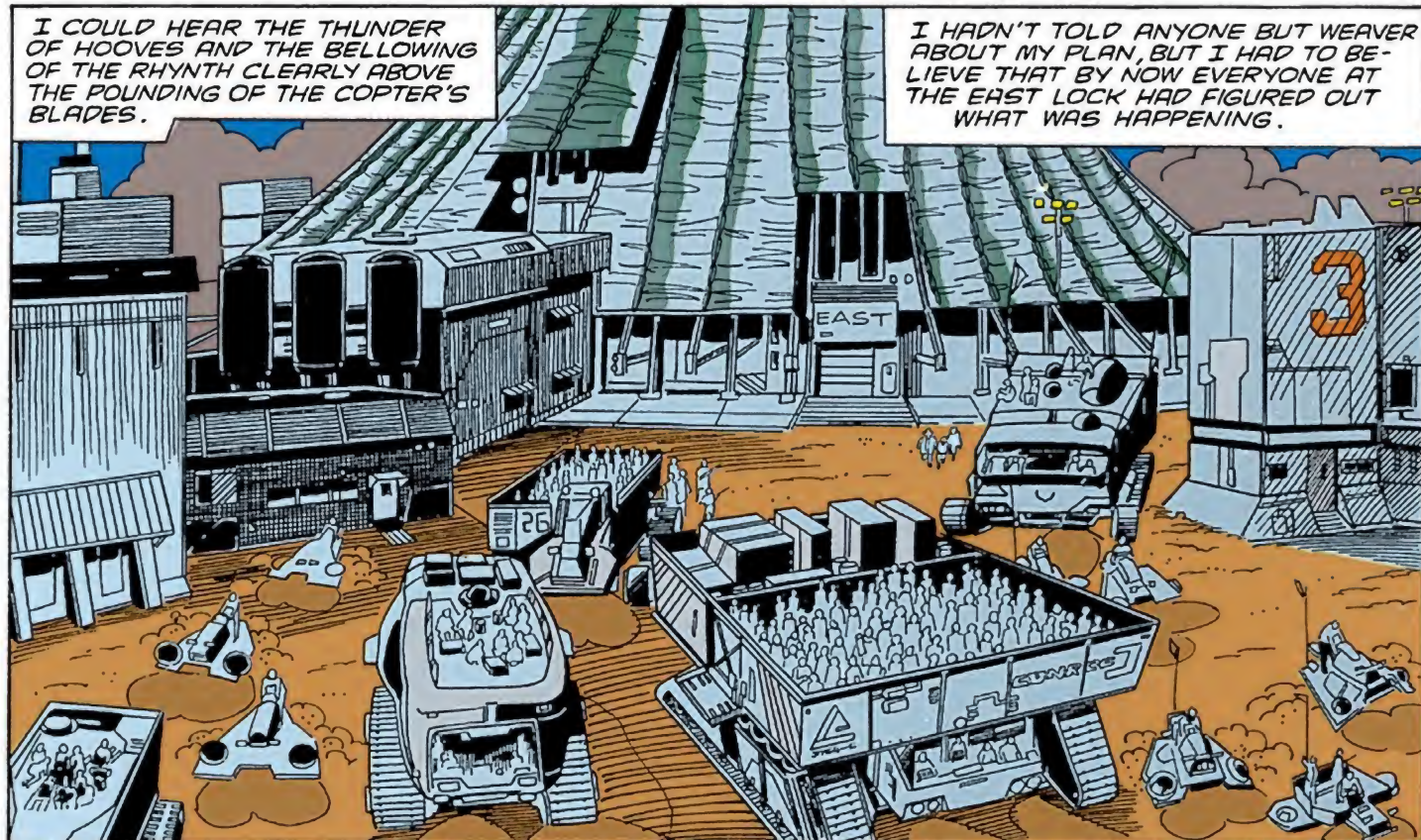


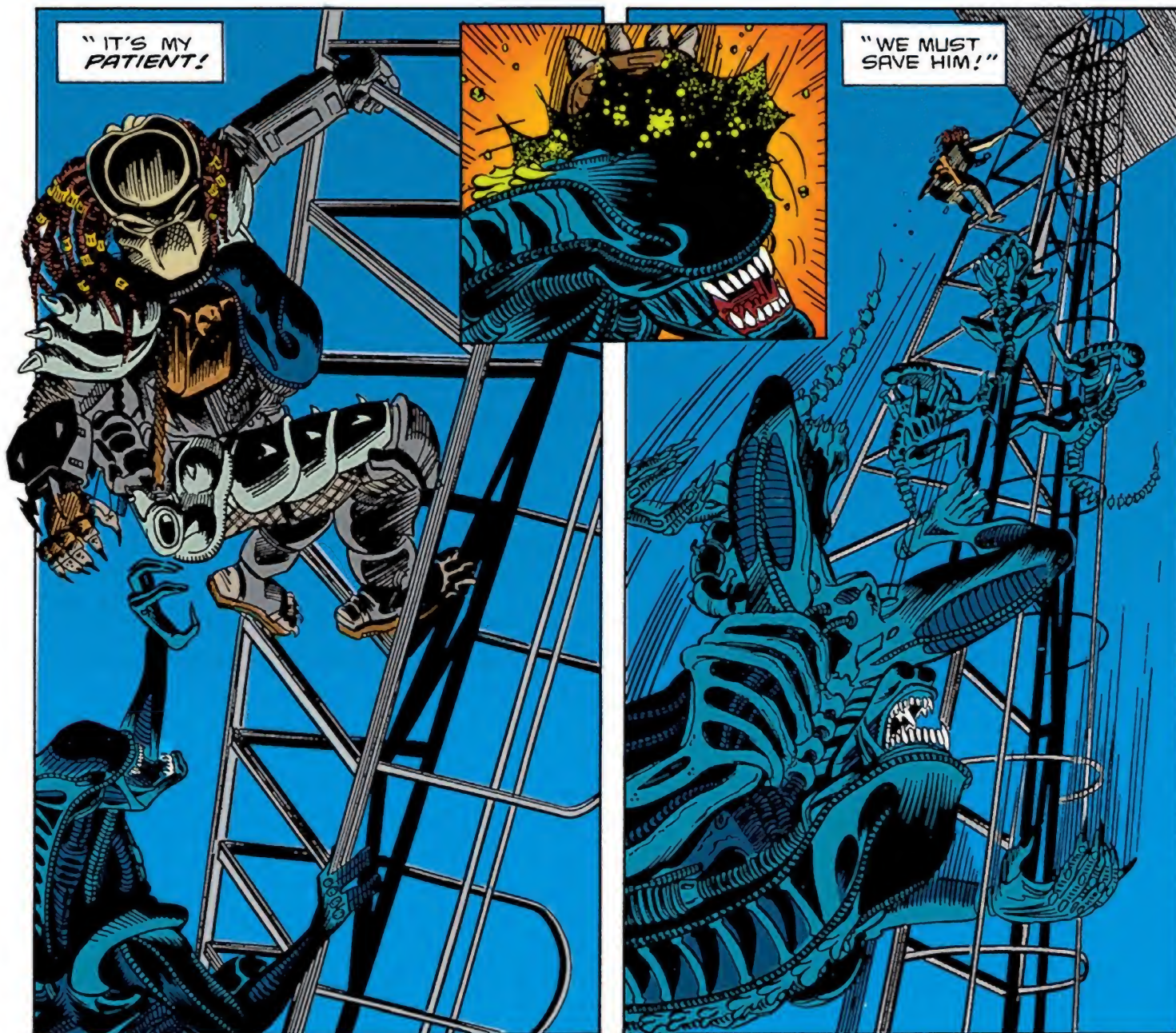


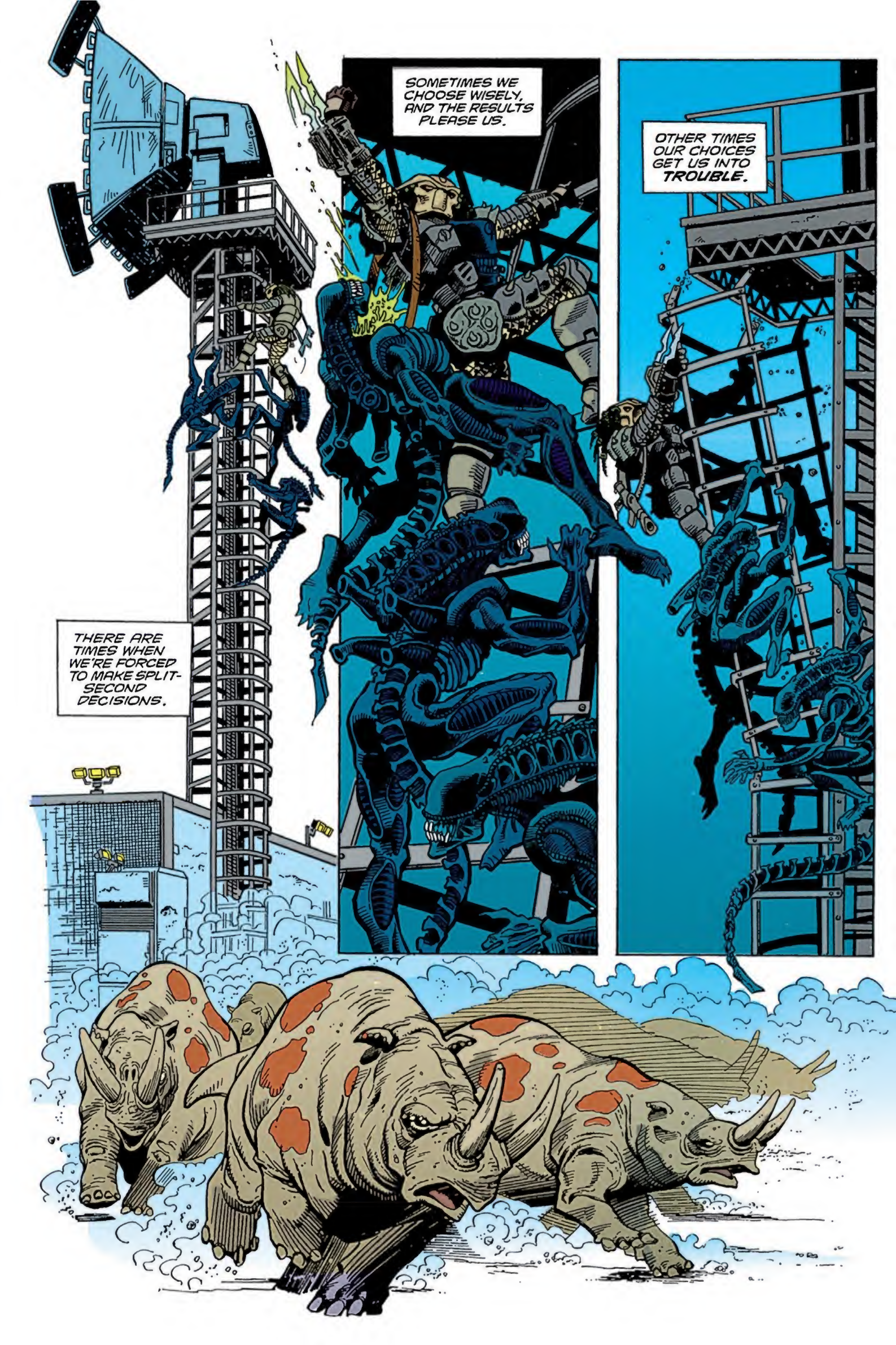
THEY SAW EVERYTHING
IN THEIR PATH AS AN
OBSTACLE TO BE CRUSHED
UNDERFOOT.

EVERYTHING.

CAUTION
300 WELSH
LIMP







SOMETIMES WE
CHOOSE WISELY,
AND THE RESULTS
PLEASE US.

OTHER TIMES
OUR CHOICES
GET US INTO
TROUBLE.

THERE ARE
TIMES WHEN
WE'RE FORCED
TO MAKE SPLIT-
SECOND
DECISIONS.





I DON'T KNOW
WHETHER THE
DECISION TO RES-
CUE THE BROKEN-
TASKED WARRIOR
WAS A GOOD CHOICE
OR A BAD ONE.

I DO KNOW IT WAS A CRAZY
ONE. IT WAS AN IMPOSSIBLE
RESCUE--EVEN A TRAINED
PILOT WOULD HAVE BALKED.



BUT THE WARRIOR HAD
PROVED HIMSELF
DIFFERENT FROM
THOSE OF HIS KIND WHO
HAD KILLED HIROKI AND
THE OTHERS, BY SAVING
MIRIAM'S LIFE ...

...AND, LIKE
HIROKI, HE
REFUSED TO
GIVE UP FIGHTING.

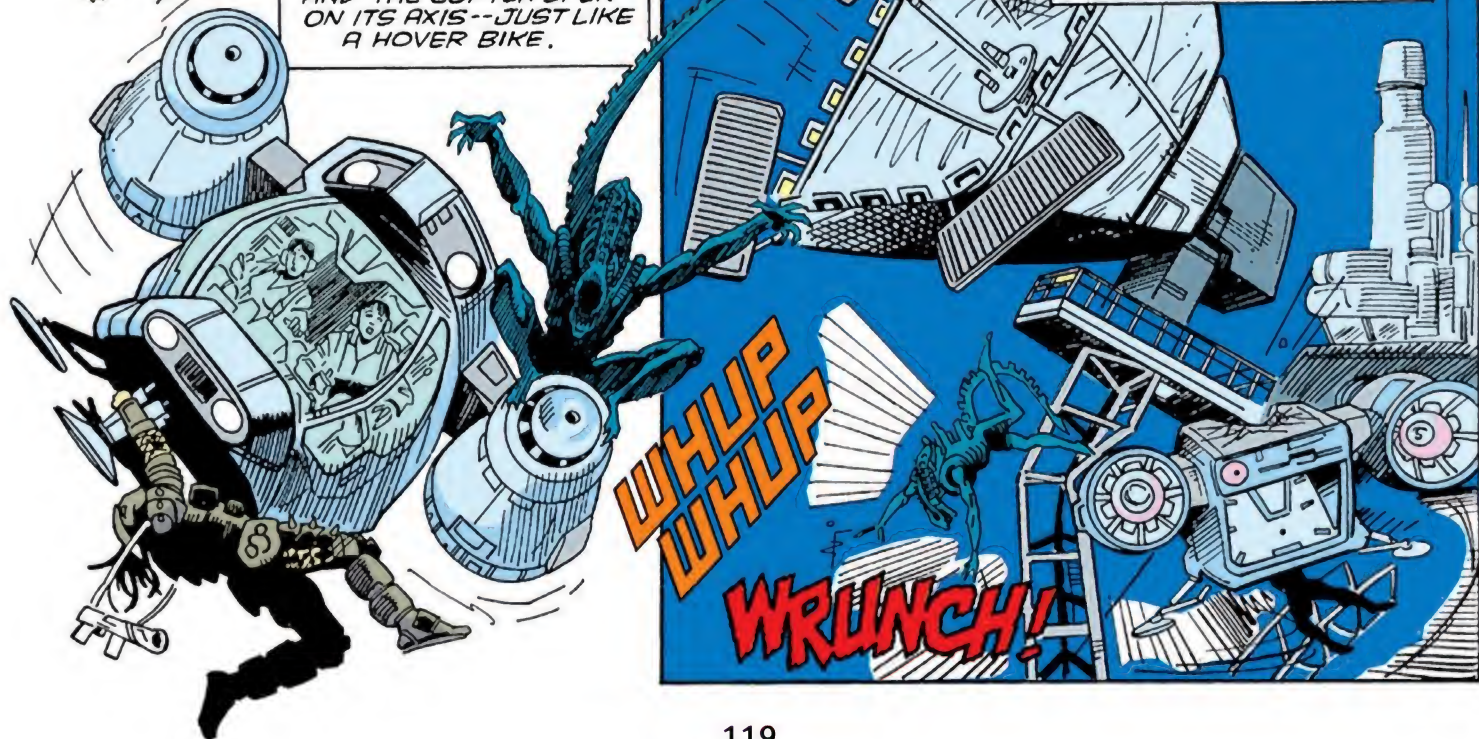
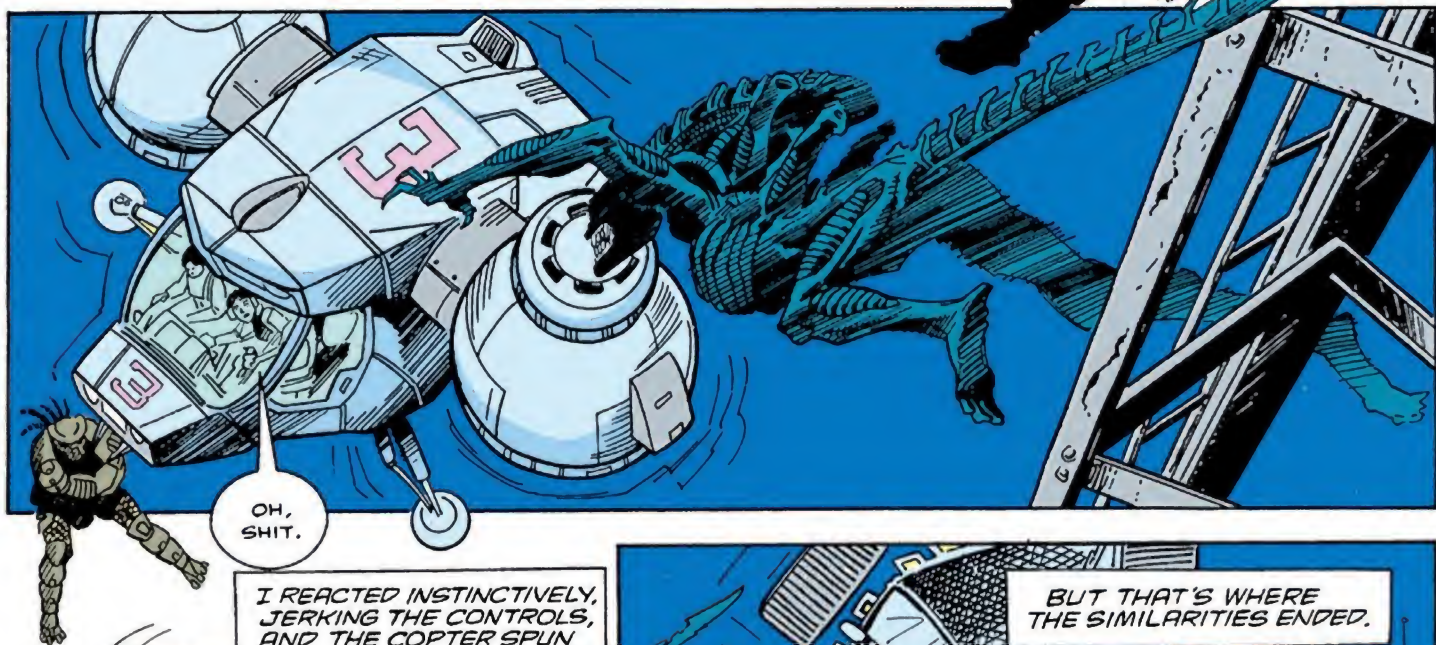
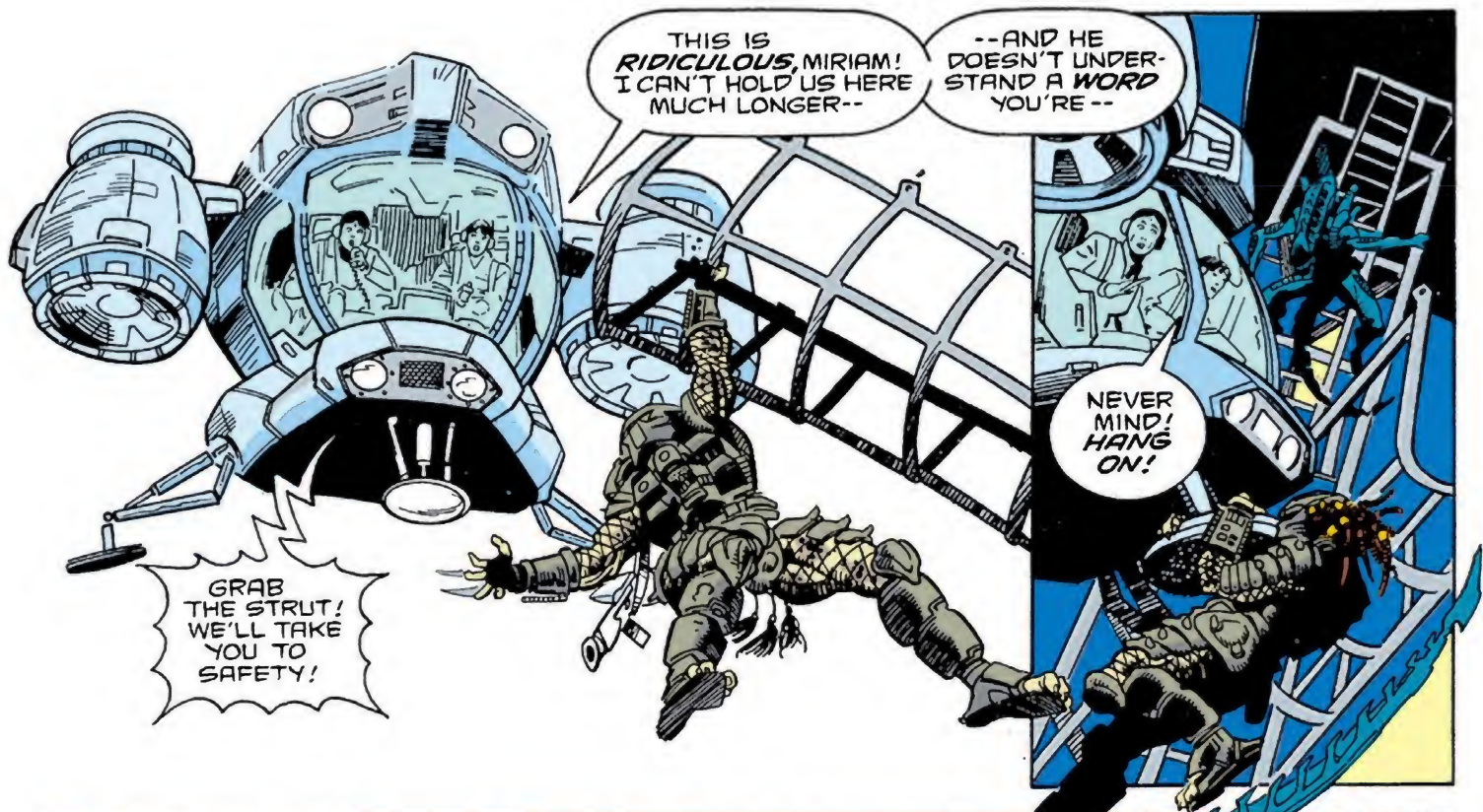


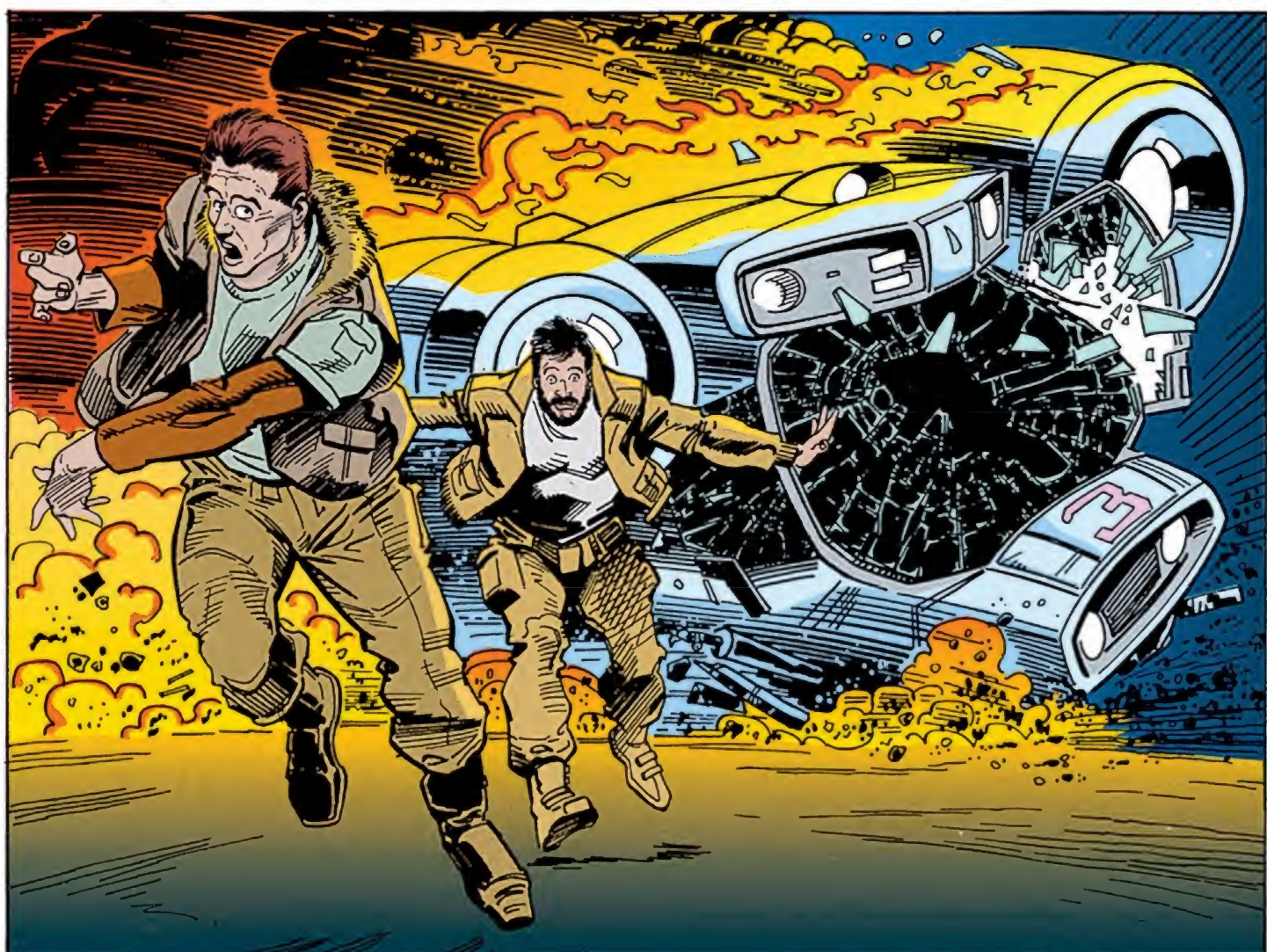
I COULD
RESPECT
THAT.

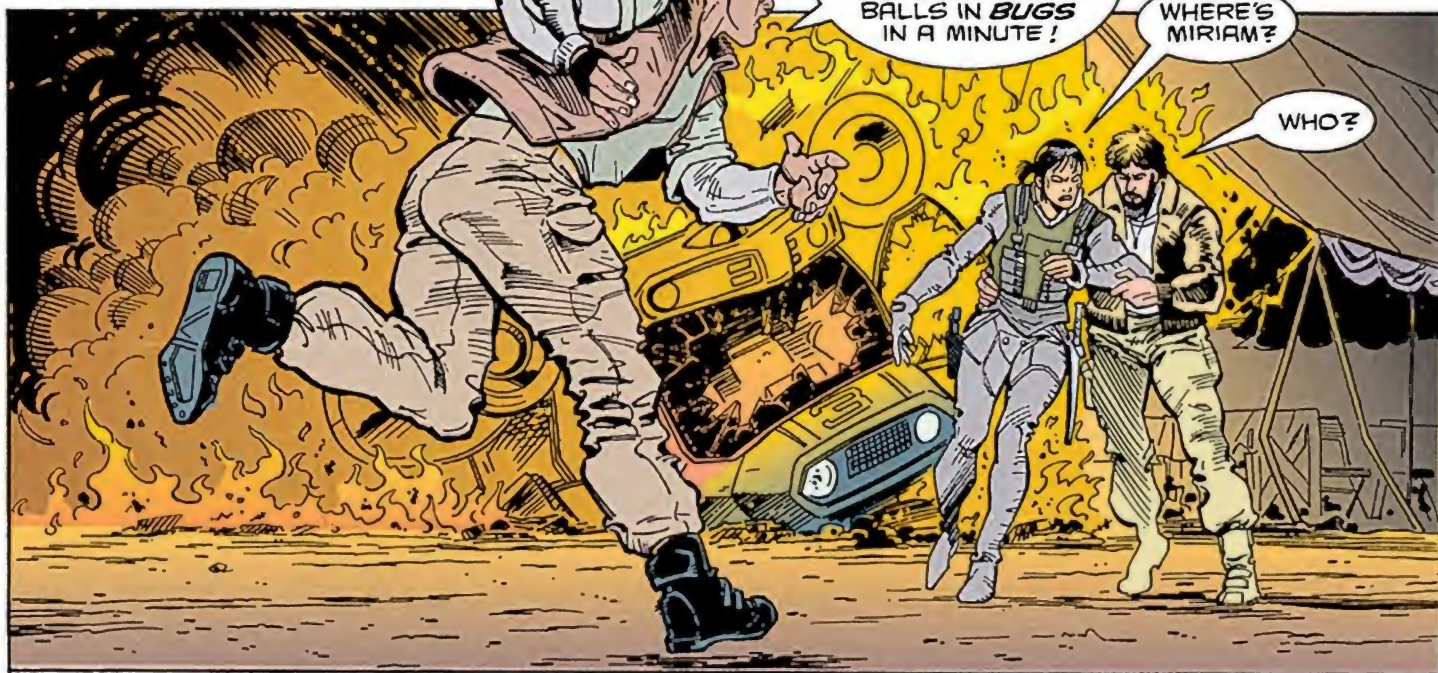
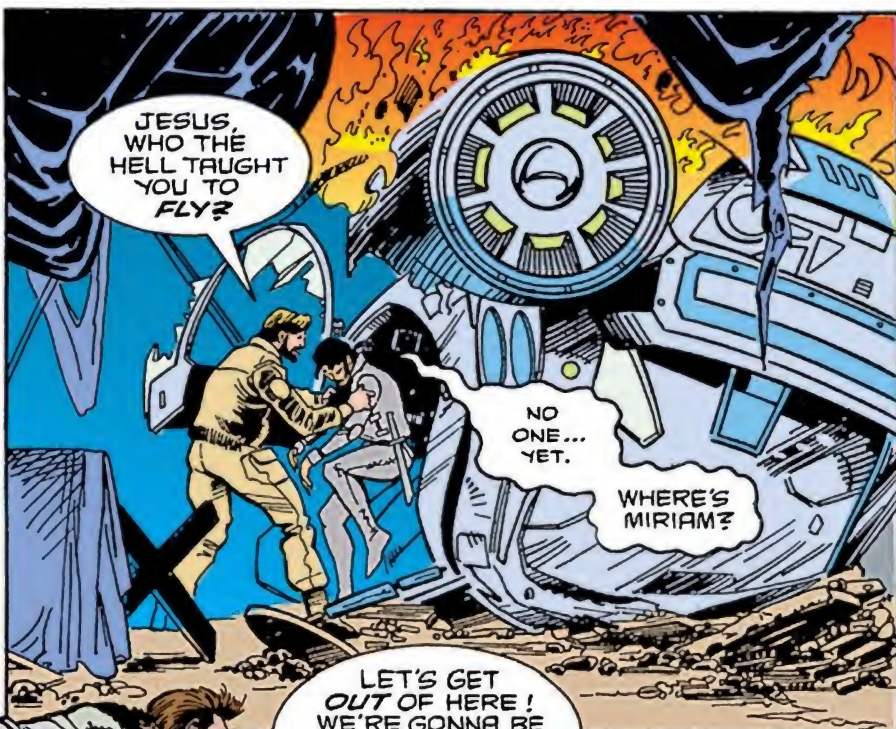


WHUP
WHUP
WHUP

GRAB
ON!







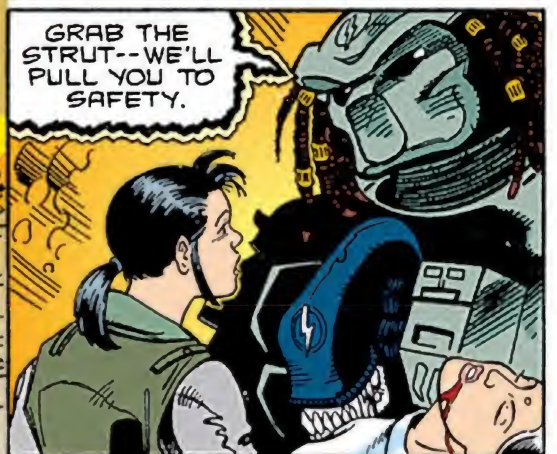


SOMEONE ELSE
WAS DEAD... SOME-
ONE I'D CARED
ABOUT...

...SOMEONE WHO'D DEPENDED ON ME.



Oh,
MIRIAM... I'M
SORRY...



GRAB THE
STRUT--WE'LL
PULL YOU TO
SAFETY.



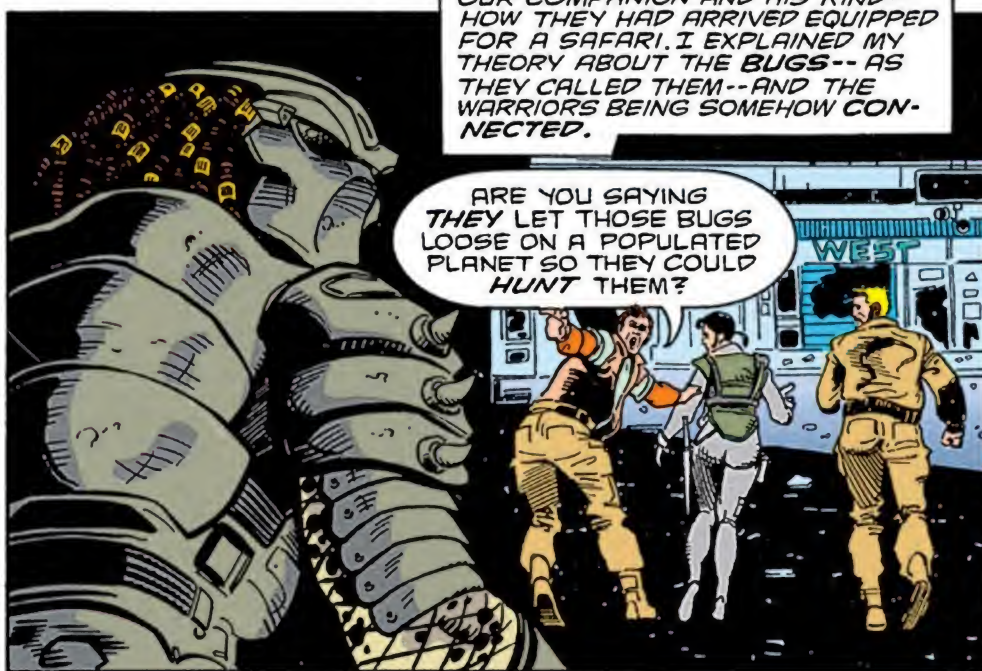
CONOVER AND STRANDBERG WERE THE LAST TWO PEOPLE IN PROSPERITY WELLS I'D HAVE WISHED TO BE STRANDED WITH, BUT NOW THAT MIRIAM WAS DEAD, THEY WERE THE LAST TWO PEOPLE.



SOMEHOW, THEY'D MISSED THE EVENTS OF THE PAST TWENTY- EIGHT HOURS. I BROUGHT THEM UP TO DATE...

I TOLD THEM WHAT I KNEW OF OUR COMPANION AND HIS KIND-- HOW THEY HAD ARRIVED EQUIPPED FOR A SAFARI. I EXPLAINED MY THEORY ABOUT THE BUGS-- AS THEY CALLED THEM--AND THE WARRIORS BEING SOMEHOW CONNECTED.

ARE YOU SAYING THEY LET THOSE BUGS LOOSE ON A POPULATED PLANET SO THEY COULD HUNT THEM?



I DON'T BELIEVE HIS KIND *KNEW* THERE WERE HUMANS ON RYUSHI. WE HAVEN'T BEEN HERE LONG-- I *DOUBT* WE WERE HERE THE LAST TIME THEY DROPPED IN.

IN FACT, OUR PRESENCE PROBABLY SCREWED UP THEIR PLANS.

OH, GREAT! I FEEL SO MUCH BETTER KNOWING THAT THIS WHOLE MESS WAS AN ACCIDENT!



HEY, AT LEAST HE'S ON OUR SIDE.

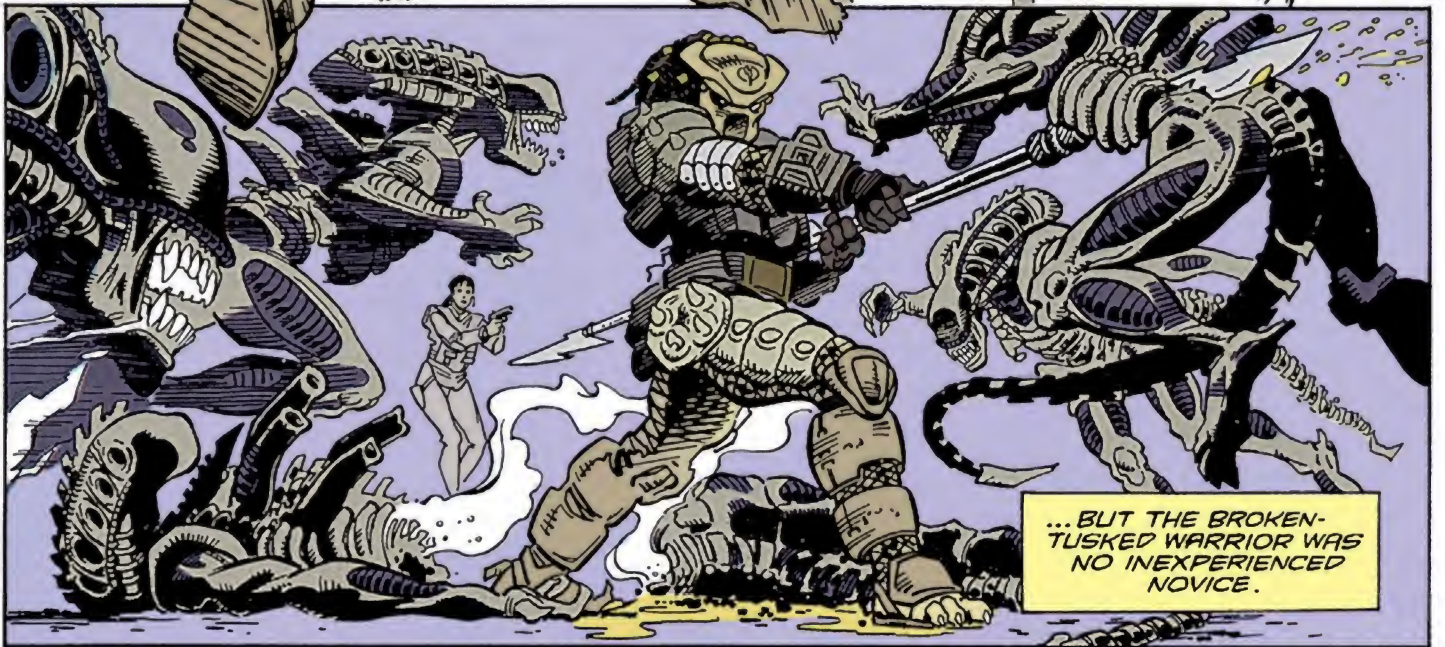
YEAH? PROBABLY ONLY UNTIL HE GETS HUNGRY...







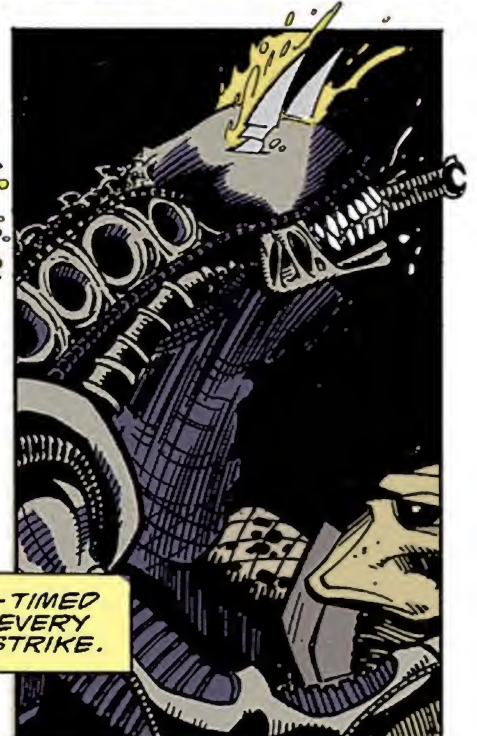
I HALF EXPECTED
A REPLAY OF THE
LOST BATTLES I'D
SEEN EARLIER...



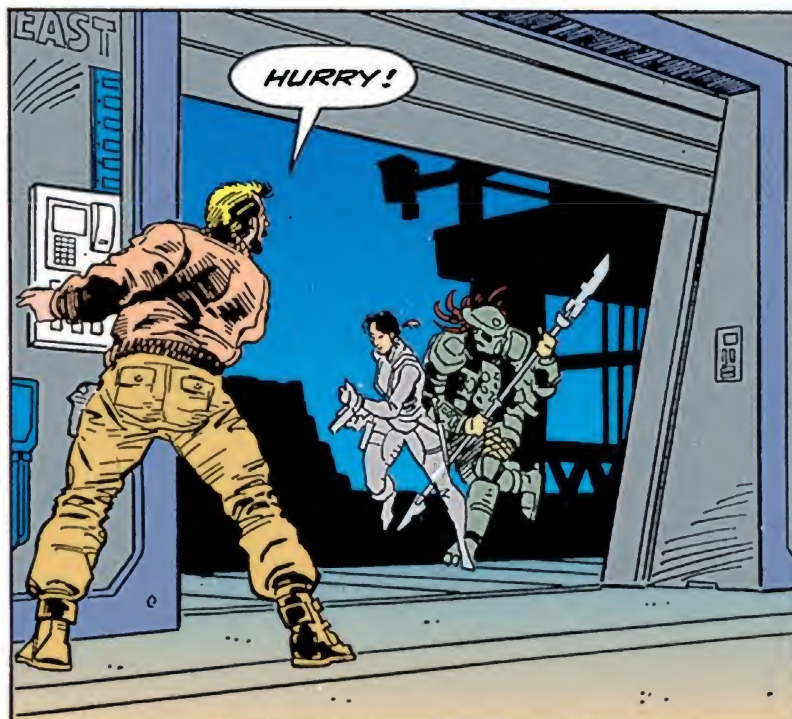
... BUT THE BROKEN-
TUSKED WARRIOR WAS
NO INEXPERIENCED
NOVICE.

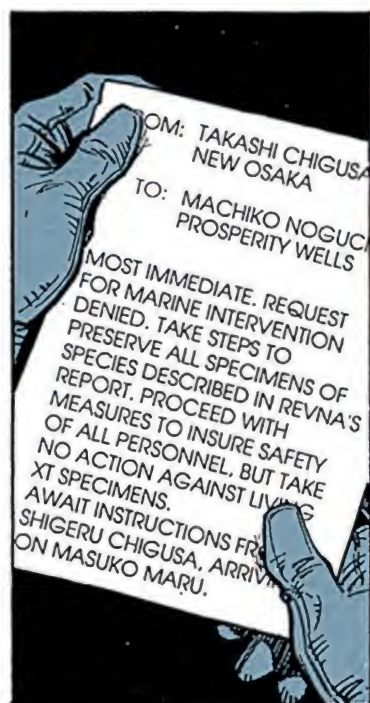
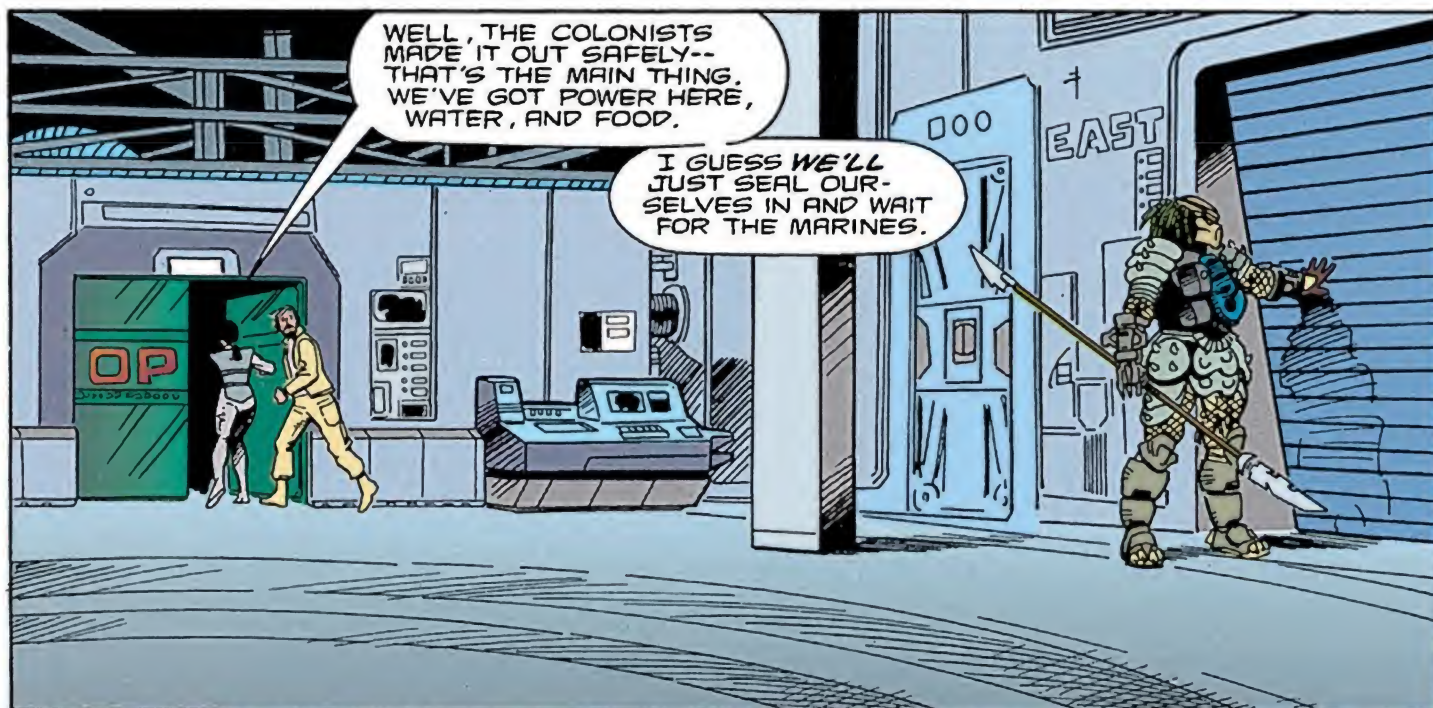


HE MEASURED
EVERY STEP--



--TIMED
EVERY
STRIKE.











"Okay, EVERYTHING YOU'LL NEED IS ON THE DISK."

"THANKS, CONOVER."

"GONNA BE TOUGH GETTING IN."

"DON'T WORRY, WE'LL FIND A WAY."

"I DON'T *coff* DOUBT THAT FOR A MINUTE, YOU KNOW, IF THIS WORKS, THE COMPANY'S GONNA BE PISSED."

"SCREW THE COMPANY."

"I WAS *coff* HOPING YOU'D SAY THAT."



HERE'S A *coff* A GOING-AWAY PRESENT-- A MAP OF THE LECTOR.

SOUNDS LIKE EVERY *coff* BUG IN THE PLACE IS TRYING TO GET IN.

IT'S ALL RIGHT--WE'RE READY TO GO--



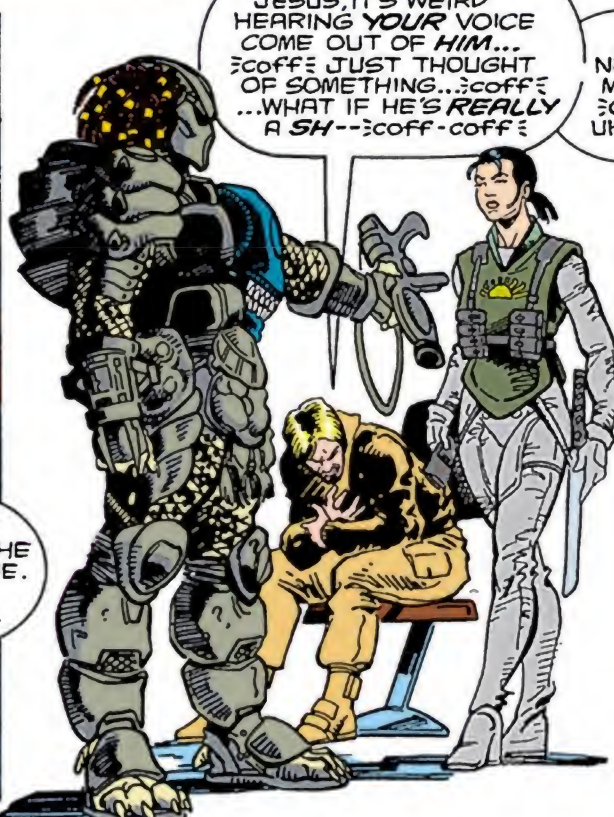
--ALMOST...

coff I GUESS *coff-coff* IT'S TIME TO KEEP YOUR HALF OF THE BARGAIN... IF YOU CAN.



I CAN MAKE IT QUICKER-- **EASIER**-- FOR YOU.

NO. I MADE THE PROMISE. I'LL DO IT.



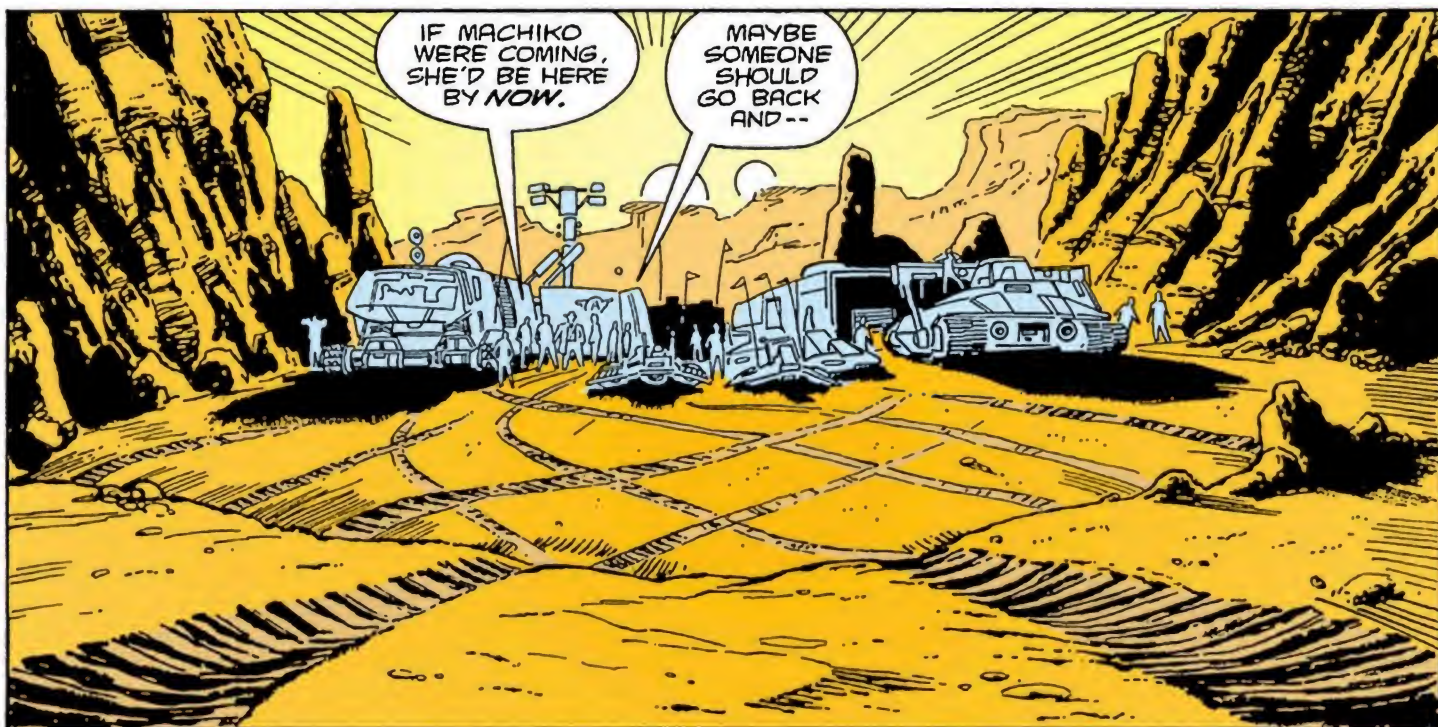
JESUS, IT'S WEIRD HEARING YOUR VOICE COME OUT OF HIM... *coff* JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING... *coff* ...WHAT IF HE'S REALLY A SH-- *coff-coff*

Aw, NEVER MIND. *coff* Uhhh....!



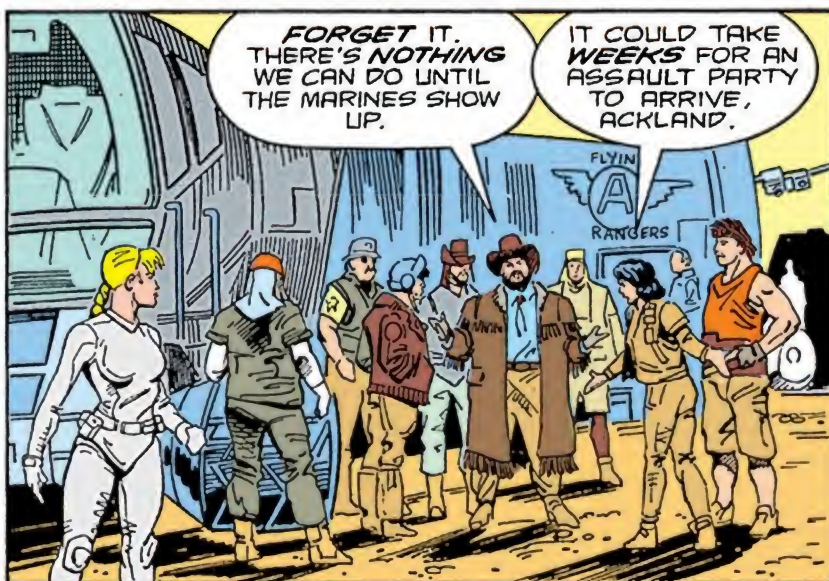
JUST-- uhn!-- DO IT!

CONOVER-- --I'LL REMEMBER YOU.



IF MACHIKO WERE COMING, SHE'D BE HERE BY NOW.

MAYBE SOMEONE SHOULD GO BACK AND--



FORGET IT. THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO UNTIL THE MARINES SHOW UP.

IT COULD TAKE WEEKS FOR AN ASSAULT PARTY TO ARRIVE, ACKLAND.



IN THE MEANTIME, MACHIKO COULD BE HURT-- OR IN NEED OF HELP.

THOSE ARE THE CHANCES SHE TOOK WHEN SHE ACCEPTED THE JOB. CHI-GUSA CORP. IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAFETY OF THE COLONISTS-- NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.



YOU BASTARD! YOU CAN'T SHOVE THIS ALL OFF ON THE COMPANY--YOU HAD ME LIE TO DOC REVNA ABOUT WHERE WE FOUND THOSE CREATURES! AND IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO SNEAK THOSE SICK RHYNTH PAST QUARANTINE!

UH, LOOK, YOU KNOW WHAT A HARD-ASS NOGUCHI IS--



--I WAS JUST TRYING TO PROTECT MY INVESTMENT...uh...OUR INVESTMENTS...

SCREW OUR INVESTMENTS-- I'VE GOT A FAMILY!

SAME HERE.

YOU CAN SAY WHAT YOU WANT ABOUT NOGUCHI, ACKLAND, BUT WHEN IT CAME DOWN TO IT, SHE RISKED HER LIFE TO SAVE ALL OF US-- INCLUDING YOU!

YOU'D BETTER PRAY SHE'S STILL ALIVE WHEN THIS IS ALL OVER.





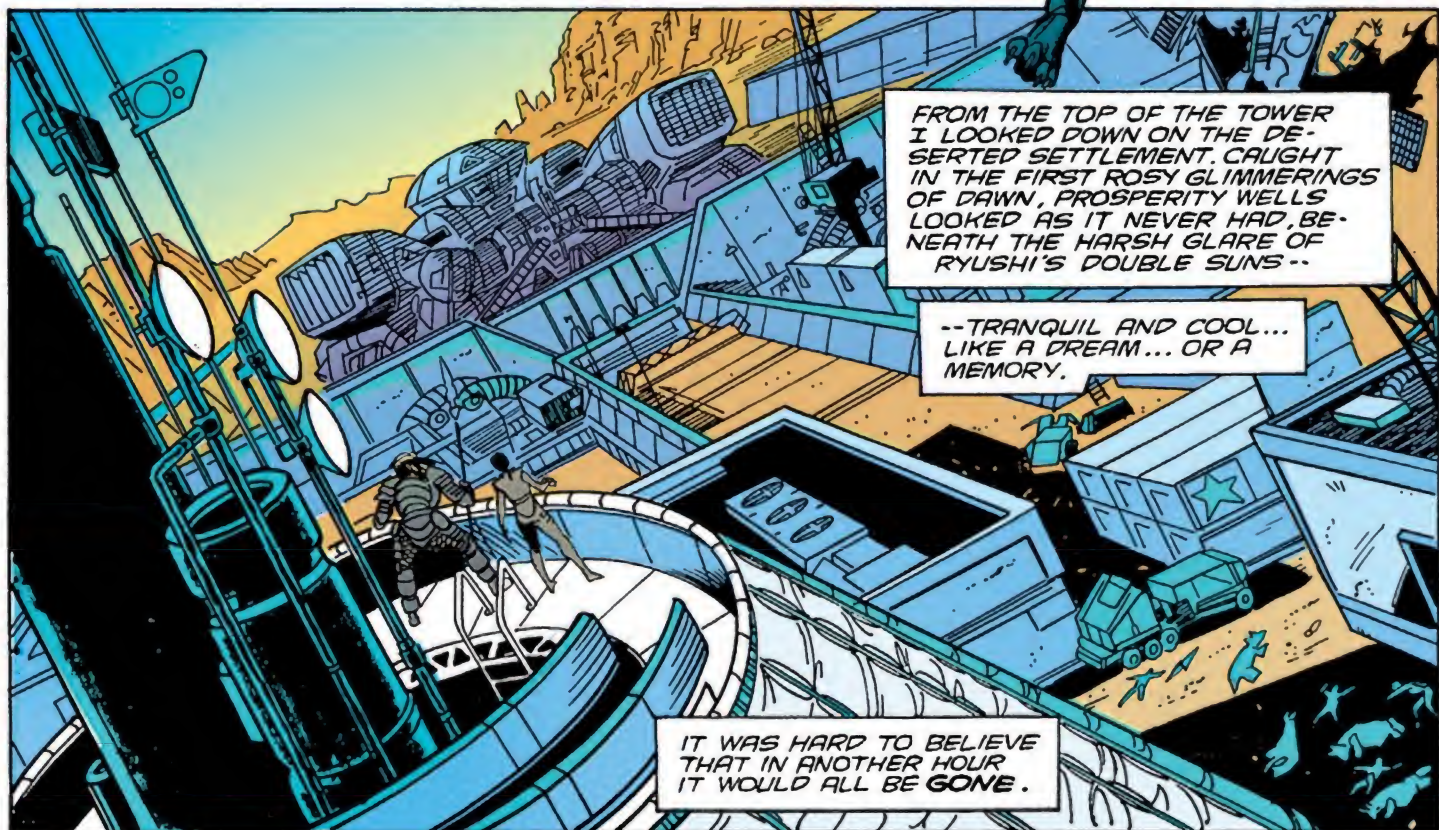
HIROKI HAD DIED FIGHTING
FOR THE SAFETY OF THE
COLONISTS...



THE REVNAS' DEDICATION
TO THEIR FRIENDS AND
PATIENTS HAD COST THEM
BOTH THEIR LIVES...



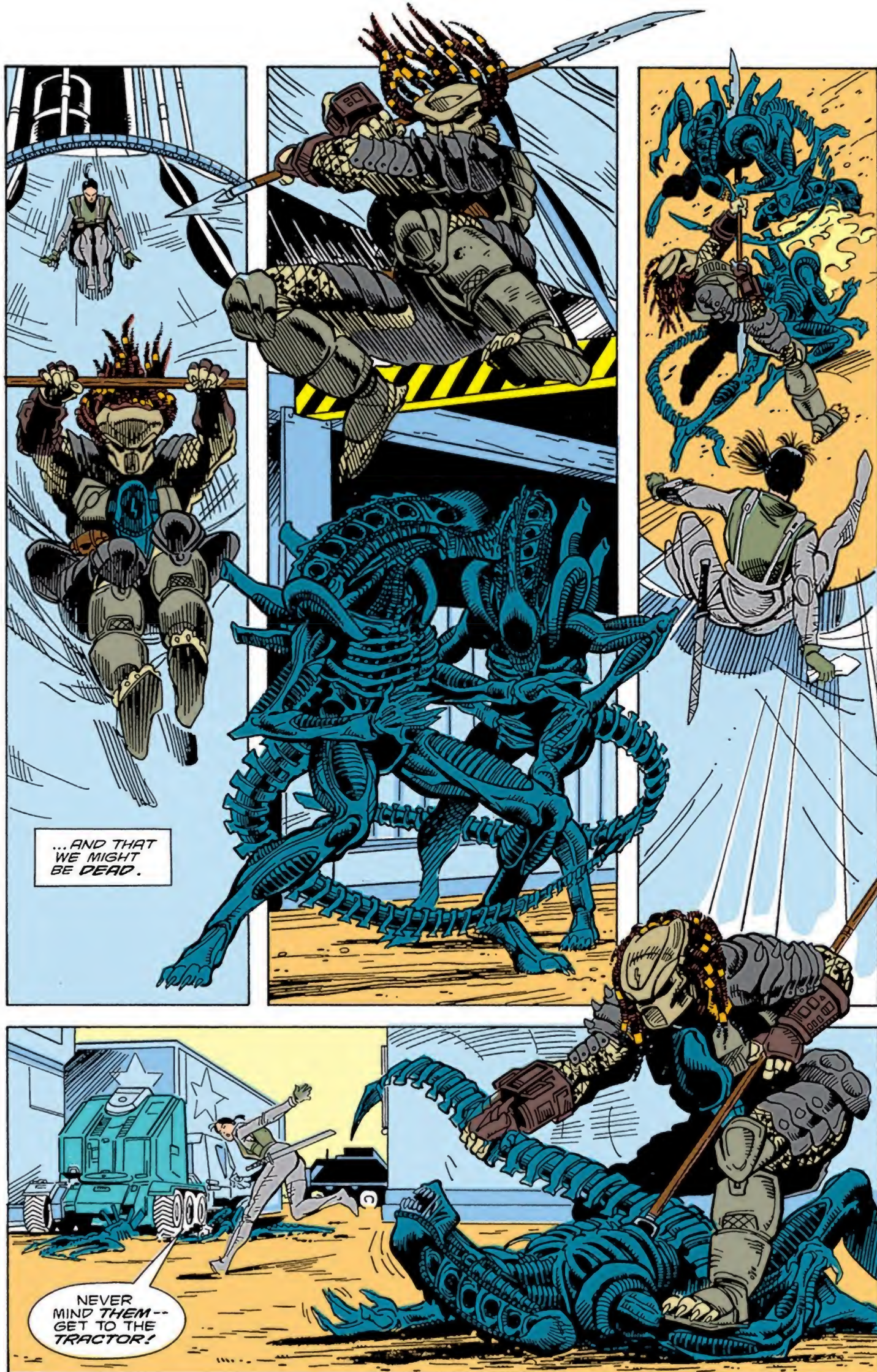
COLLINS... MASON... RILEY... JOHNSON...
AND ALL OF THE OTHERS HAD GIVEN
THEIR LIVES FOR THE CONTINUED
EXISTENCE OF PROSPERITY WELLS.

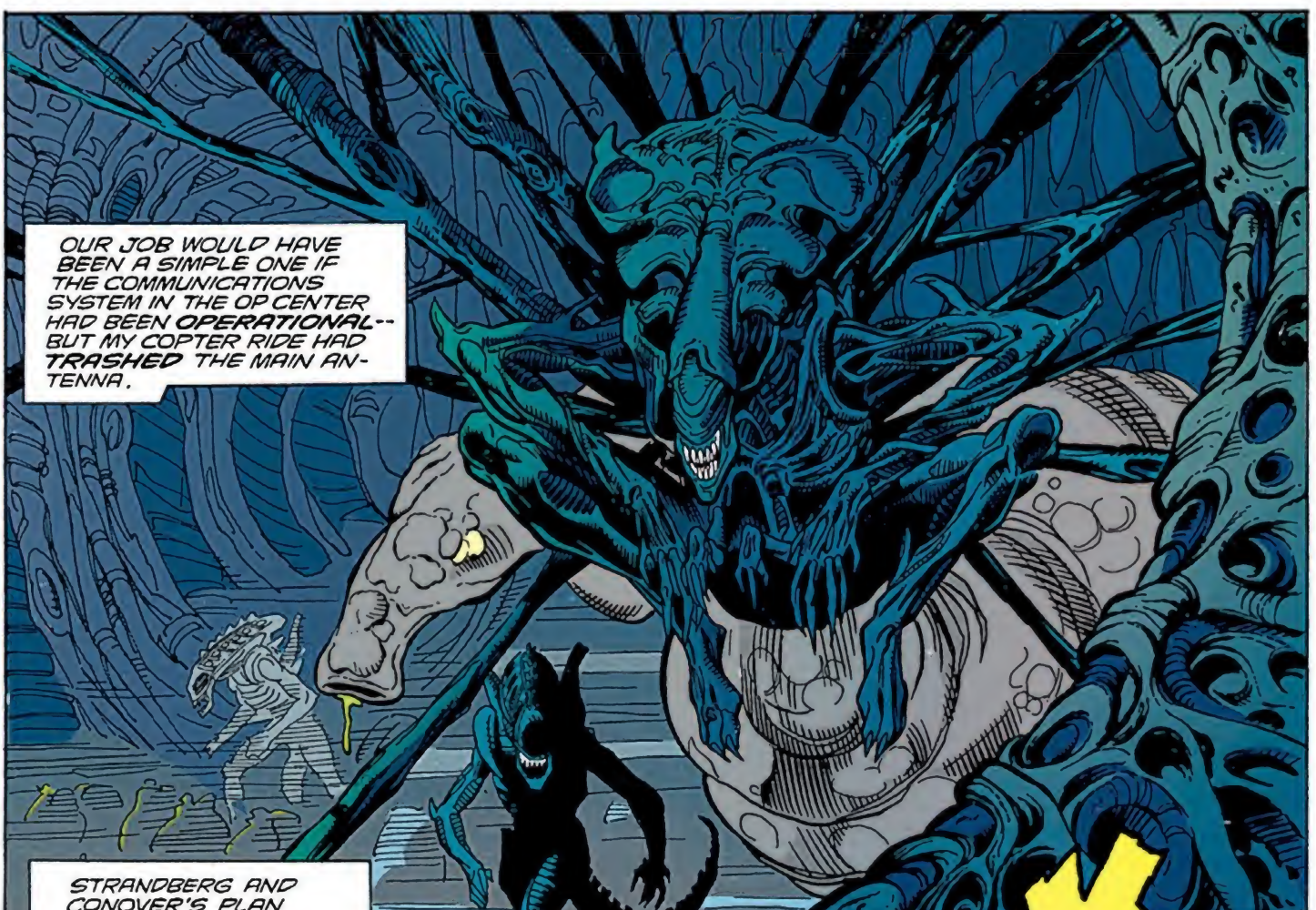


FROM THE TOP OF THE TOWER
I LOOKED DOWN ON THE DE-
SERTED SETTLEMENT. CAUGHT
IN THE FIRST ROSY GLIMMERINGS
OF DAWN, PROSPERITY WELLS
LOOKED AS IT NEVER HAD, BE-
NEATH THE HARSH GLARE OF
RYUSHI'S DOUBLE SUNS--

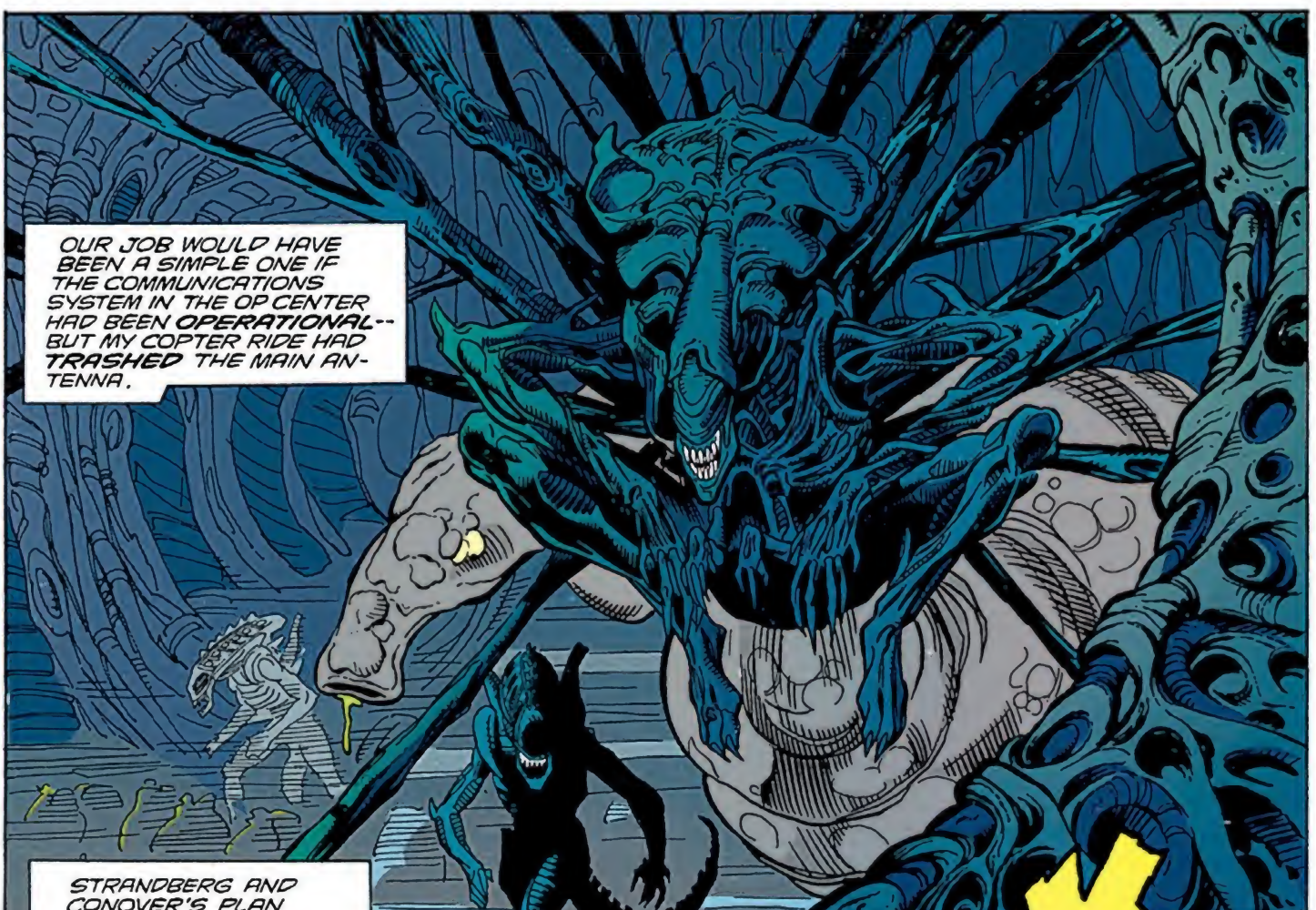
--TRANQUIL AND COOL...
LIKE A DREAM... OR A
MEMORY.

IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE
THAT IN ANOTHER HOUR
IT WOULD ALL BE GONE.





OUR JOB WOULD HAVE BEEN A SIMPLE ONE IF THE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM IN THE OP CENTER HAD BEEN OPERATIONAL-- BUT MY COPTER RIDE HAD TRASHED THE MAIN ANTENNA.



STRANDBERG AND CONOVER'S PLAN REQUIRED AN OFF-PLANET TRANSMISSION -- AND THAT MEANT A TRIP TO THE LECTOR--

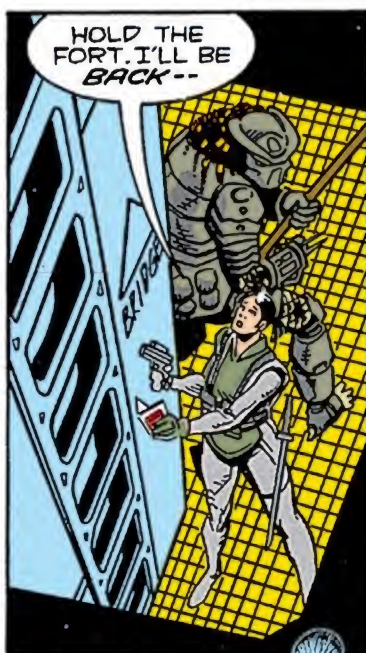
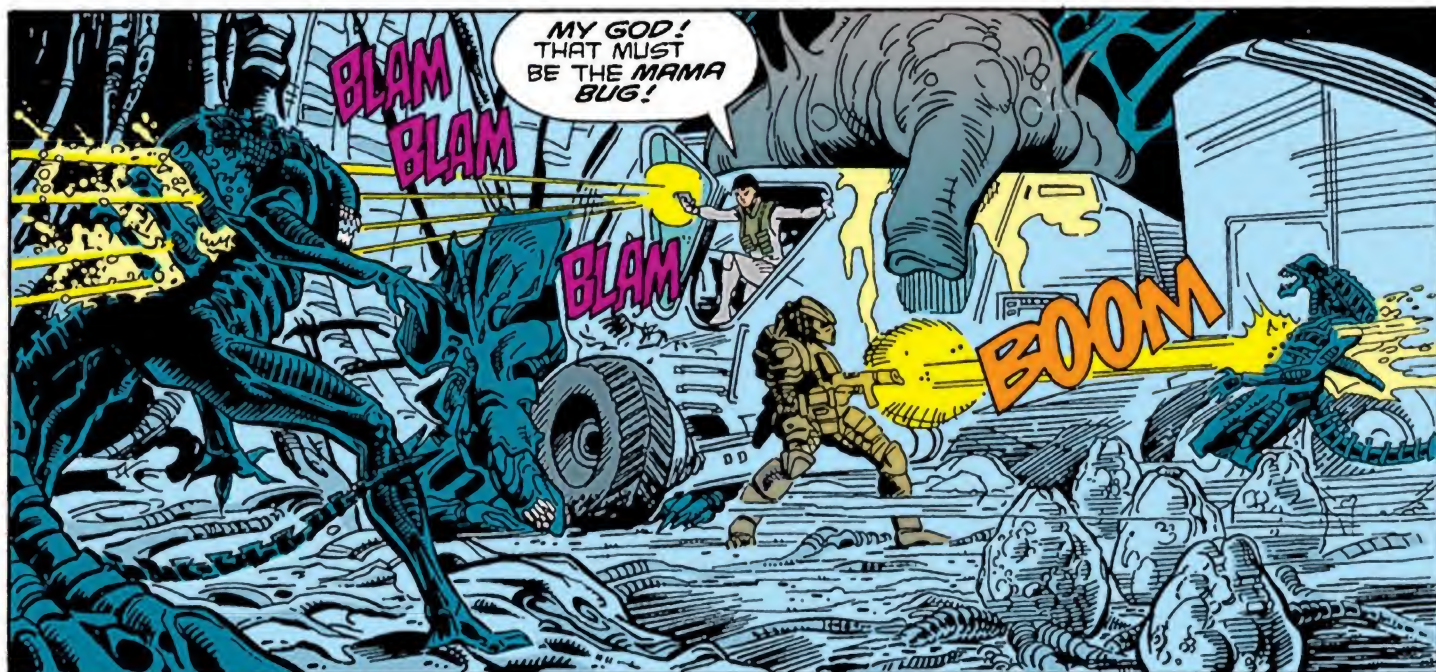


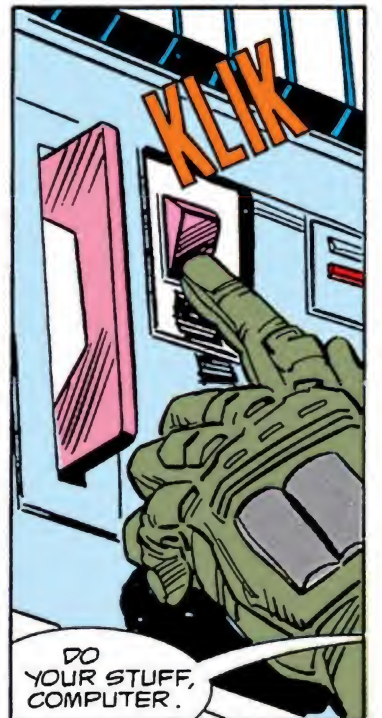
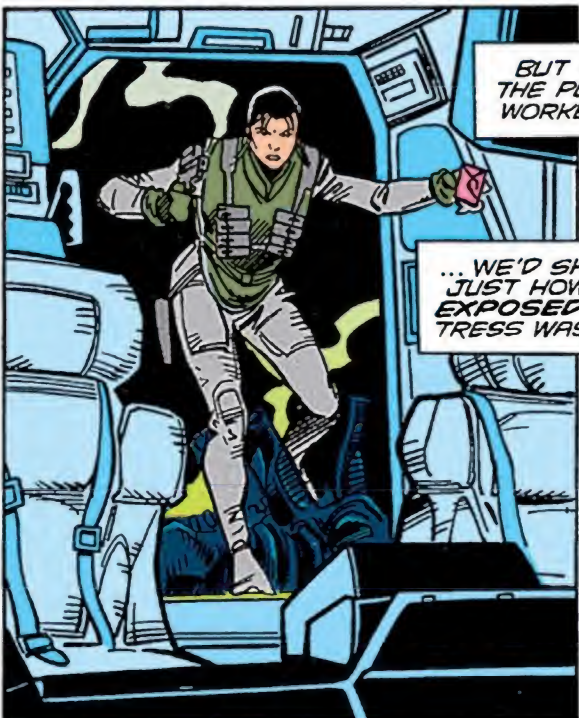
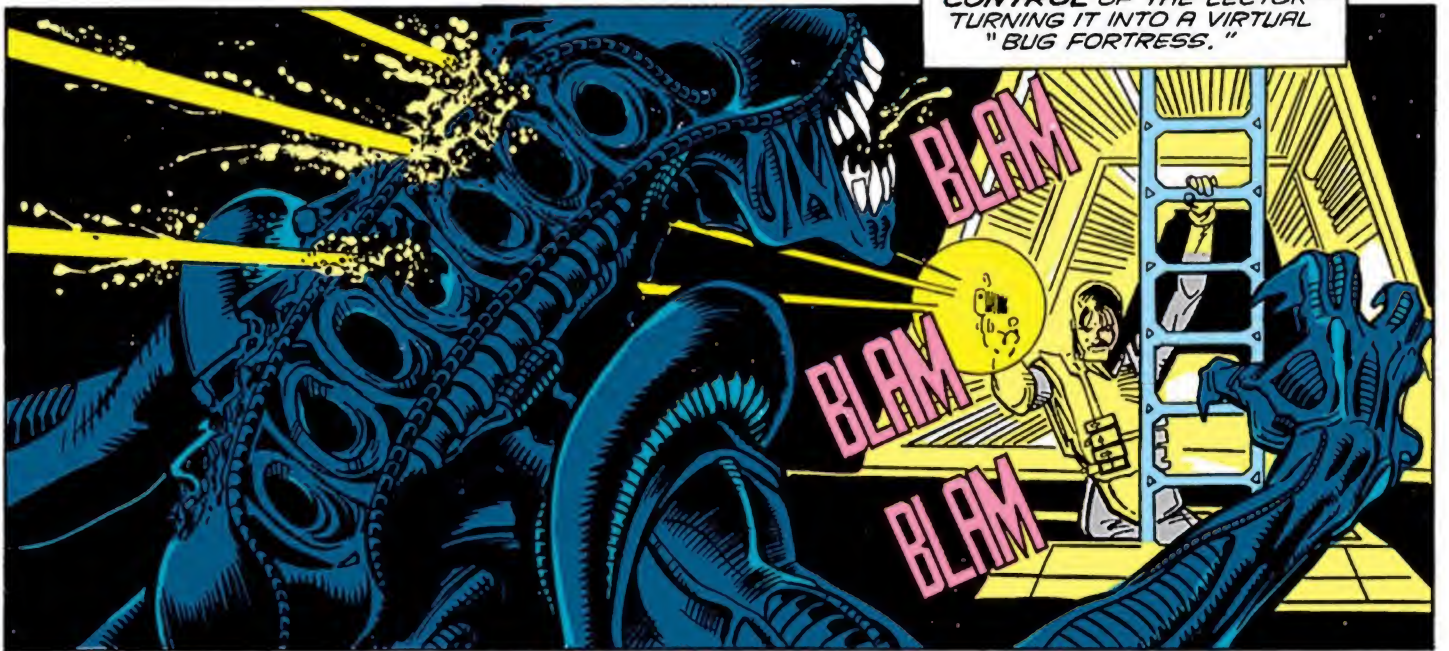
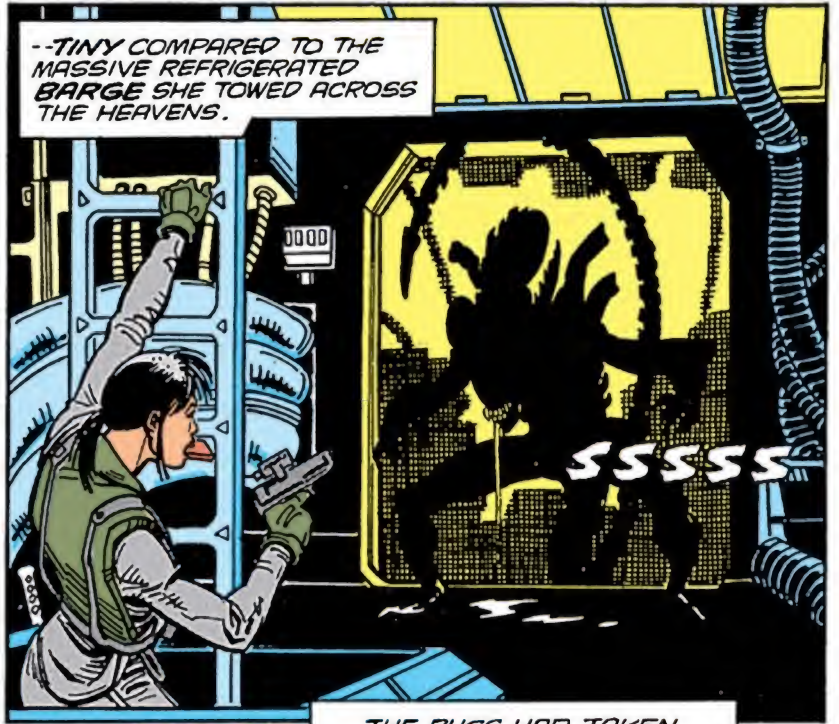
--BUG CENTRAL.

**K
R
A
S
H**

SKREEEEEEEE

SKKRUNCH

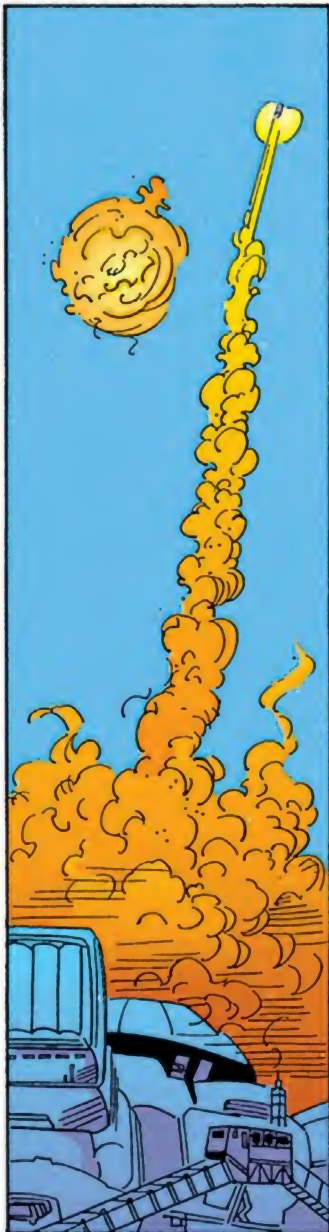
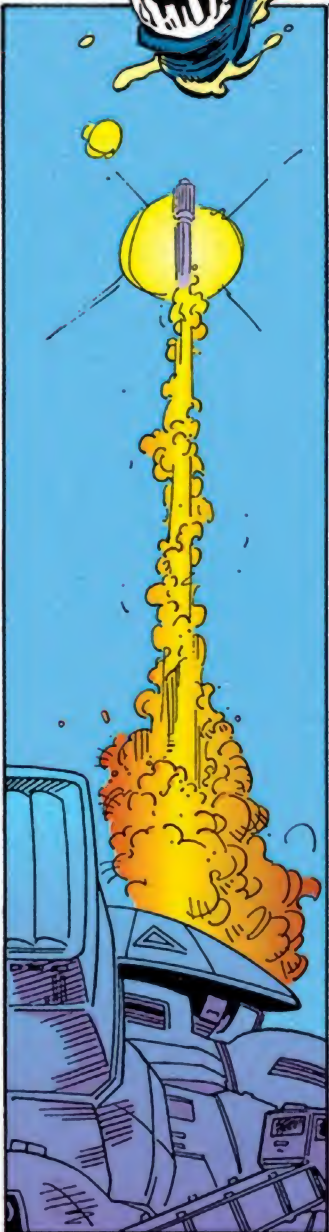




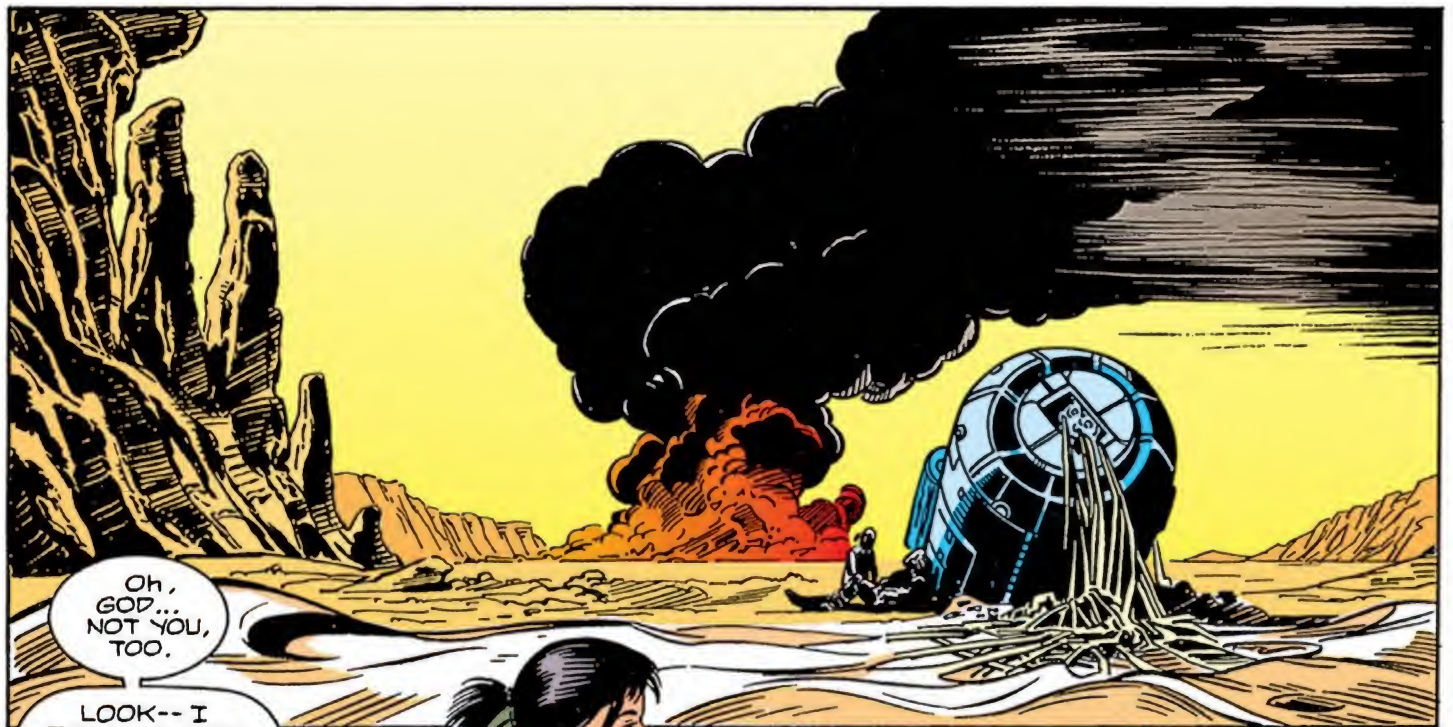












OH,
GOD...
NOT YOU,
TOO.

LOOK-- I
THINK YOU CAN
UNDERSTAND
ME--

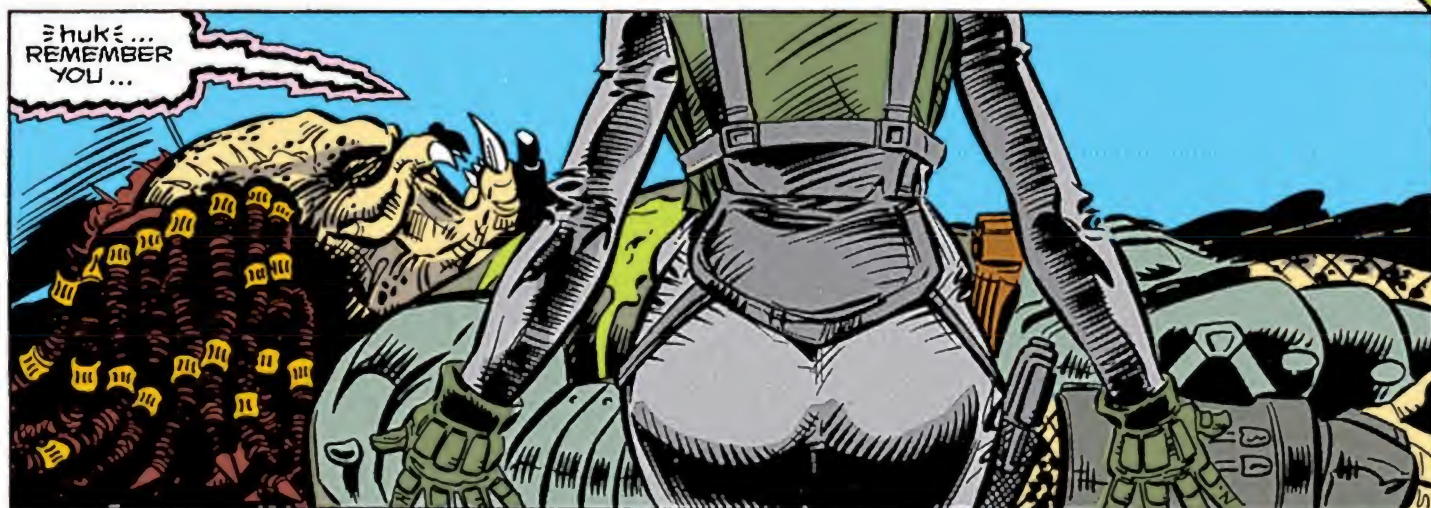


--HANG ON. HELP WILL
BE HERE SOON. THE
COLONISTS WILL COME
TO SEE WHAT'S
HAPPENED...

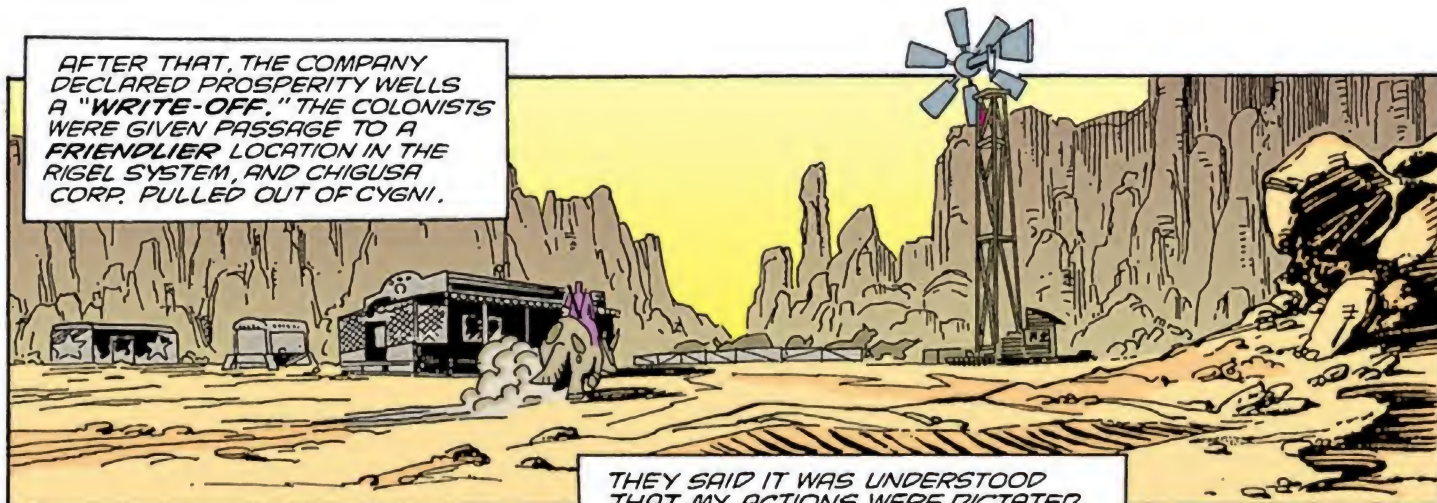
HOLD THE
FORT. I'LL BE
BACK...*shuké...*



...WHEN
I'M DONE...



AFTER THAT, THE COMPANY DECLARED PROSPERITY WELLS A "WRITE-OFF." THE COLONISTS WERE GIVEN PASSAGE TO A FRIENDLIER LOCATION IN THE RIGEL SYSTEM, AND CHIGUSA CORP. PULLED OUT OF CYGNI.



THEY SAID IT WAS UNDERSTOOD THAT MY ACTIONS WERE DICTATED BY NECESSITY--BUT MY CONTRACT WAS BOUGHT OUT, I EXPECTED NO LESS.

THEY WERE NICE ENOUGH, THOUGH-- I WAS OFFERED PASSAGE BACK TO EARTH, AND WITH THE CREDITS FROM THE BUY-OUT, I COULD HAVE STARTED AGAIN.

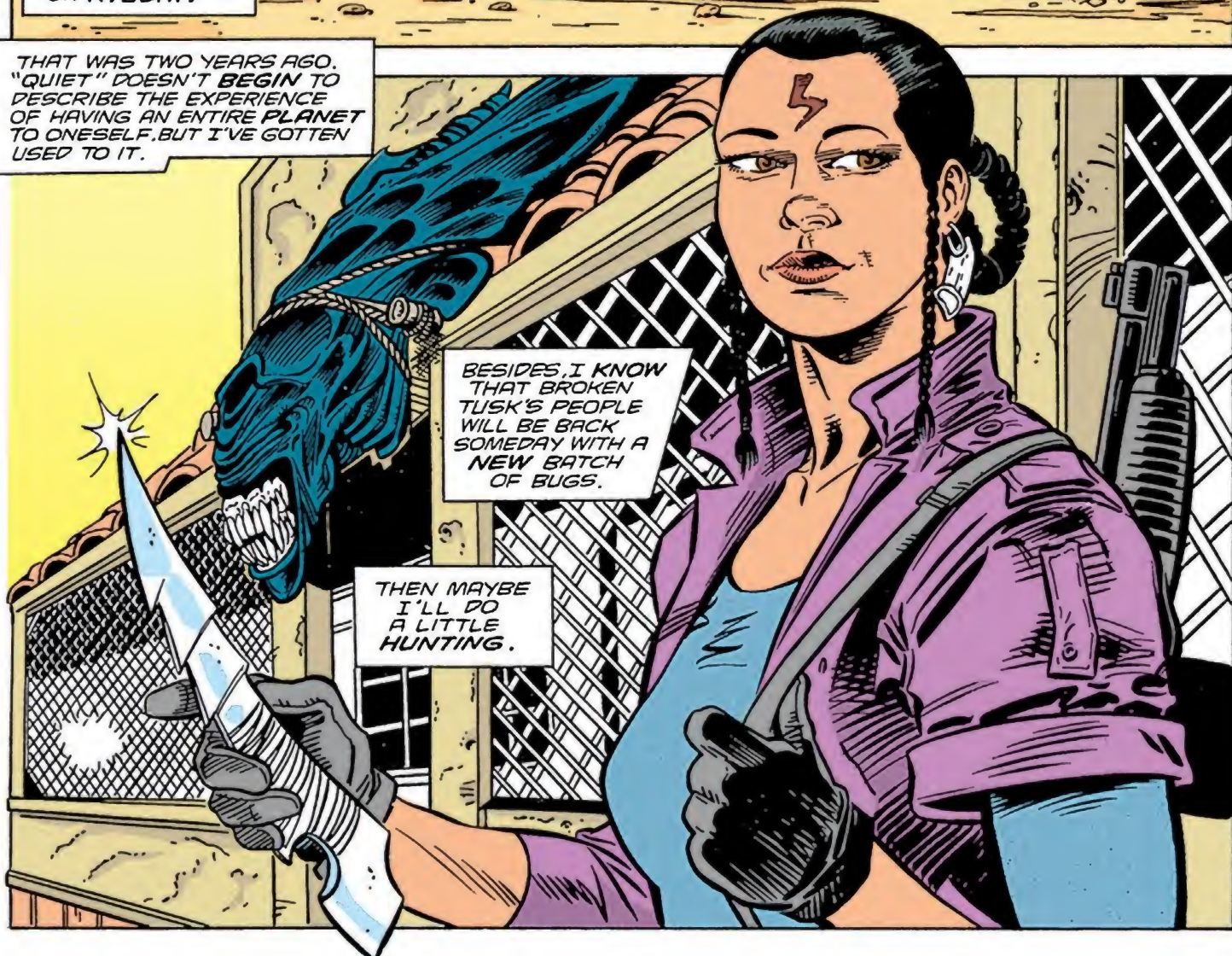
I GUESS I SHOCKED THEM WHEN I SAID I WAS STAYING. IT JUST SEEMED THAT EVERYTHING I'D EVER CARED ABOUT--OR LEARNED TO CARE ABOUT--WAS ON RYUSHI.

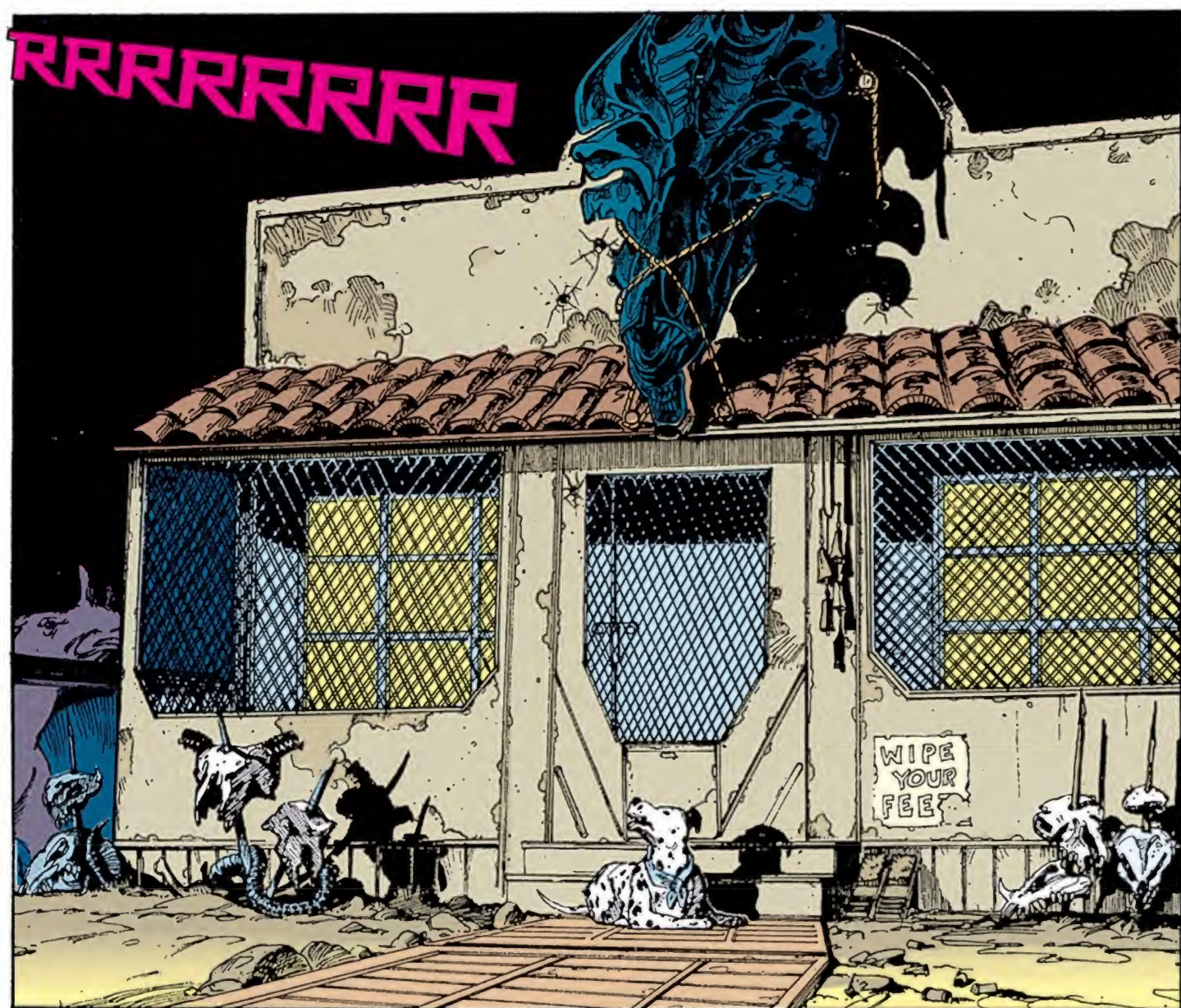


THAT WAS TWO YEARS AGO. "QUIET" DOESN'T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE THE EXPERIENCE OF HAVING AN ENTIRE PLANET TO ONESELF, BUT I'VE GOTTEN USED TO IT.

BESIDES, I KNOW THAT BROKEN TUSK'S PEOPLE WILL BE BACK SOMEDAY WITH A NEW BATCH OF BUGS.

THEN MAYBE I'LL DO A LITTLE HUNTING.





A comic book illustration of a woman with short dark hair, wearing an orange jumpsuit, standing on a porch. She is holding a large knife in her right hand and a device that emits a 'BEEP BEEP' sound in her left hand. A Dalmatian dog is barking 'ROWF ROWF ROWF'. The background shows a house with a window and a fence.

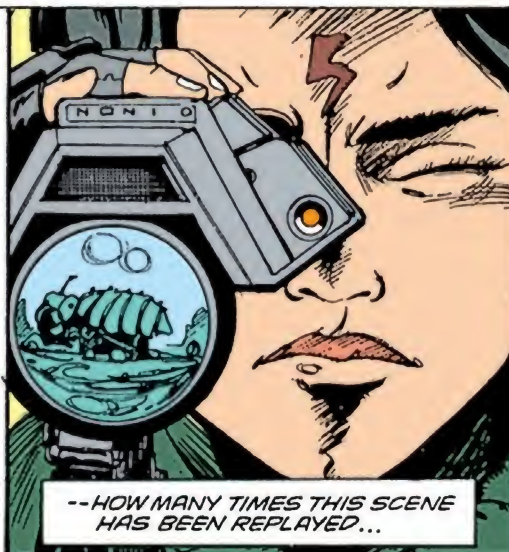


THEY'VE RETURNED.

A comic book panel featuring Ripley from the Alien franchise. He is shown from the chest up, wearing his signature orange flight jacket. He has a determined expression and is holding a plasma gun in his right hand and a combat knife in his left. Behind him, a large, screaming alien head (likely a Queen) is visible, hanging from the ceiling by chains. The background shows the interior of the Nostromo with its characteristic circular ventilation grates. The panel is framed by a black border, and the text "THEY'VE RETURNED." is written in a white box in the top left corner.



FULLY AUTOMATED. VERY SLICK--LIKE STOCKING A POND WITH TROUT. I WONDER HOW LONG THIS HAS GONE ON--



--HOW MANY TIMES THIS SCENE HAS BEEN REPLAYED...



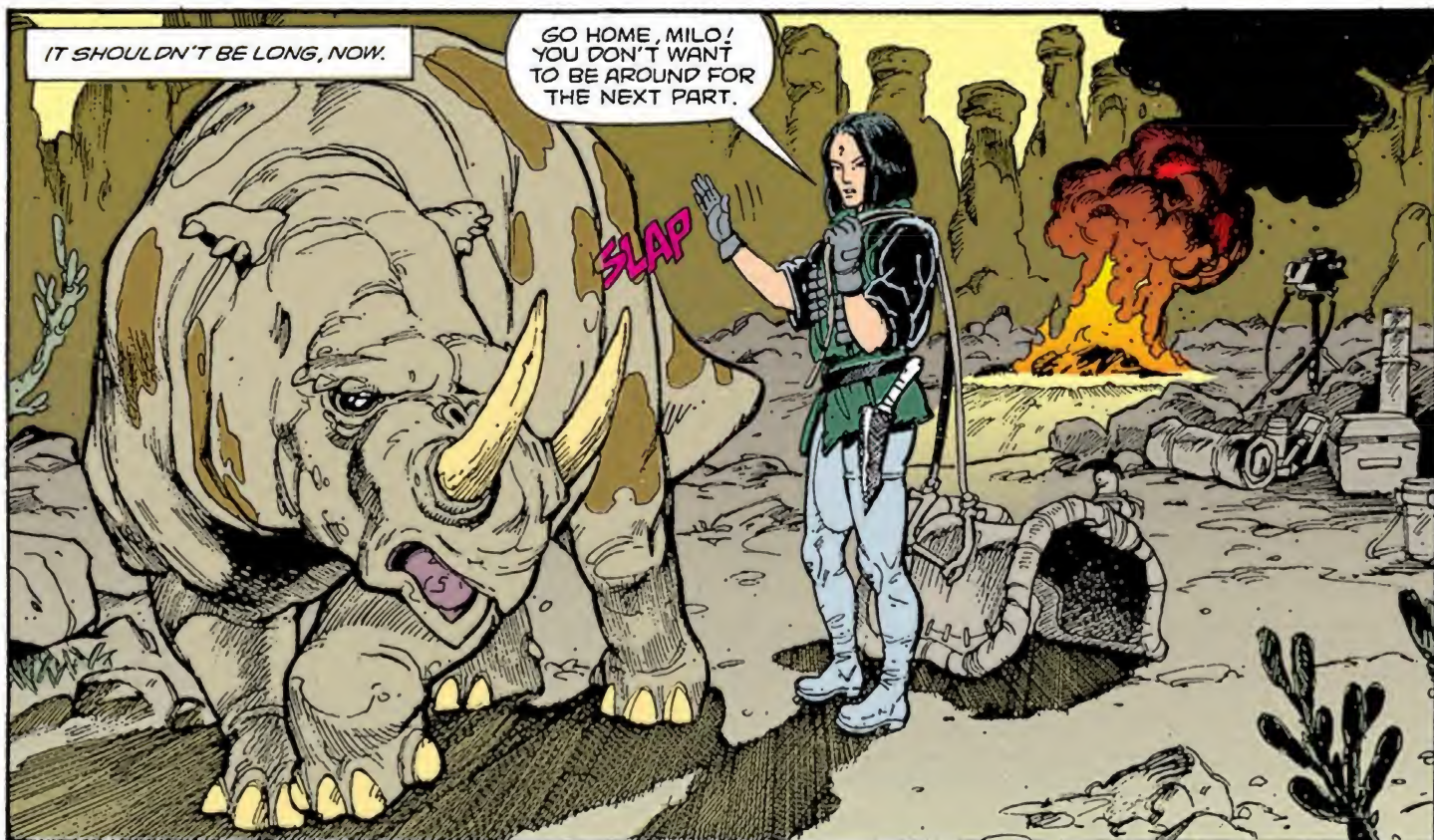
SELF-DESTRUCTING. THAT EXPLAINS WHY CHIGUSA'S CLEAN-UP SQUAD COULDN'T FIND ANY TRACE OF A LANDER FOR THE BUGS.

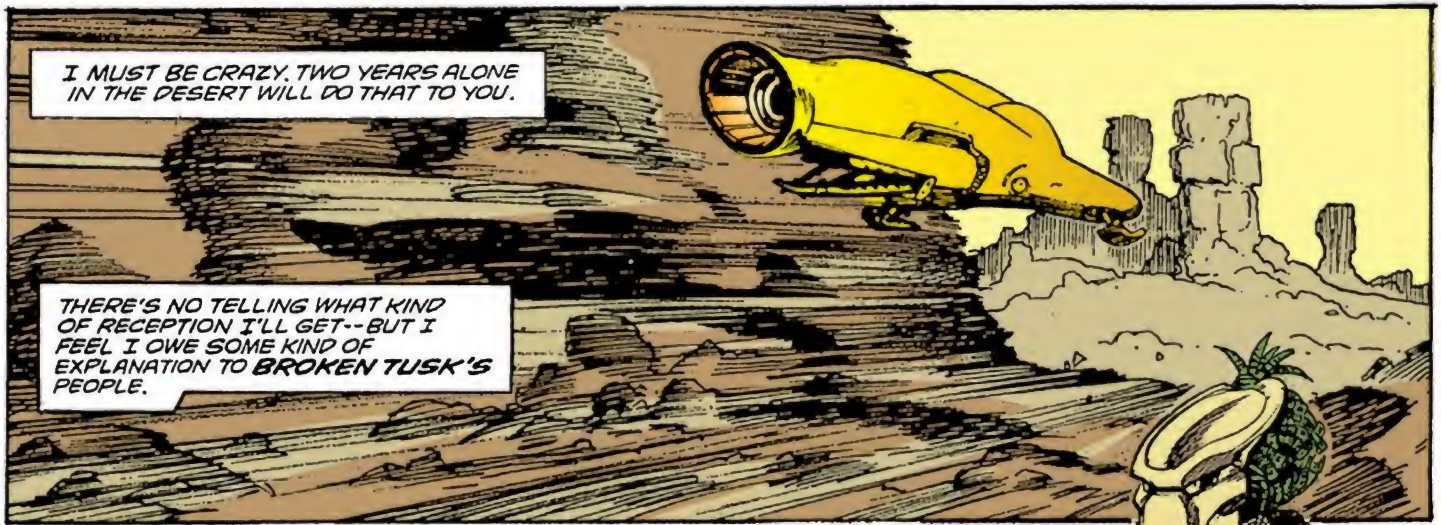


IT SHOULDN'T BE LONG, NOW.

GO HOME, MILO!
YOU DON'T WANT
TO BE AROUND FOR
THE NEXT PART.

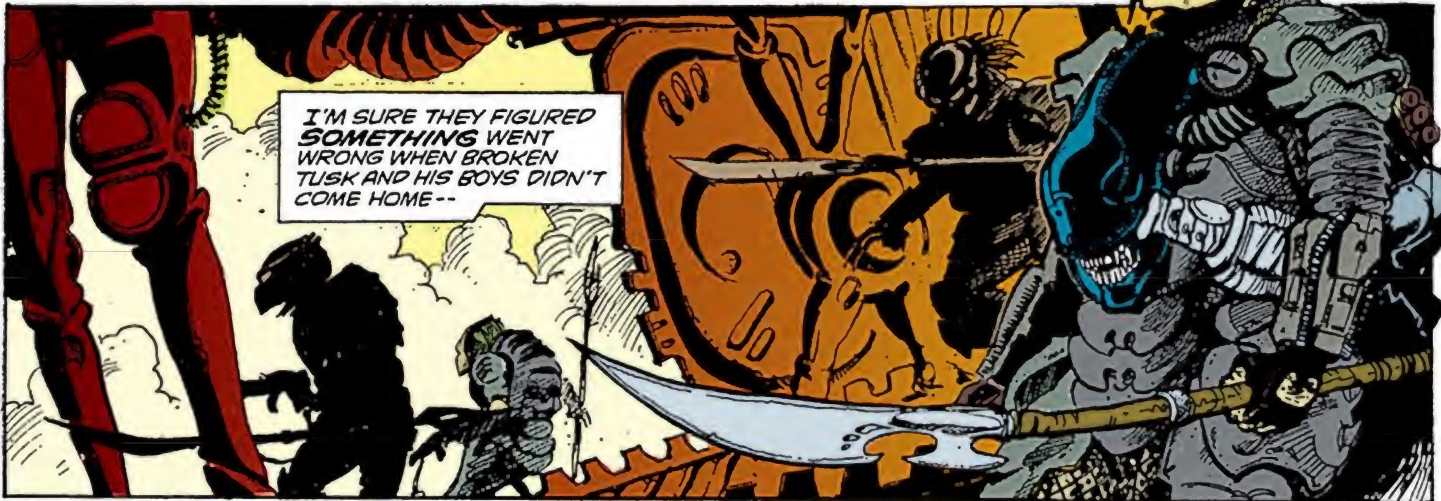
SLAP



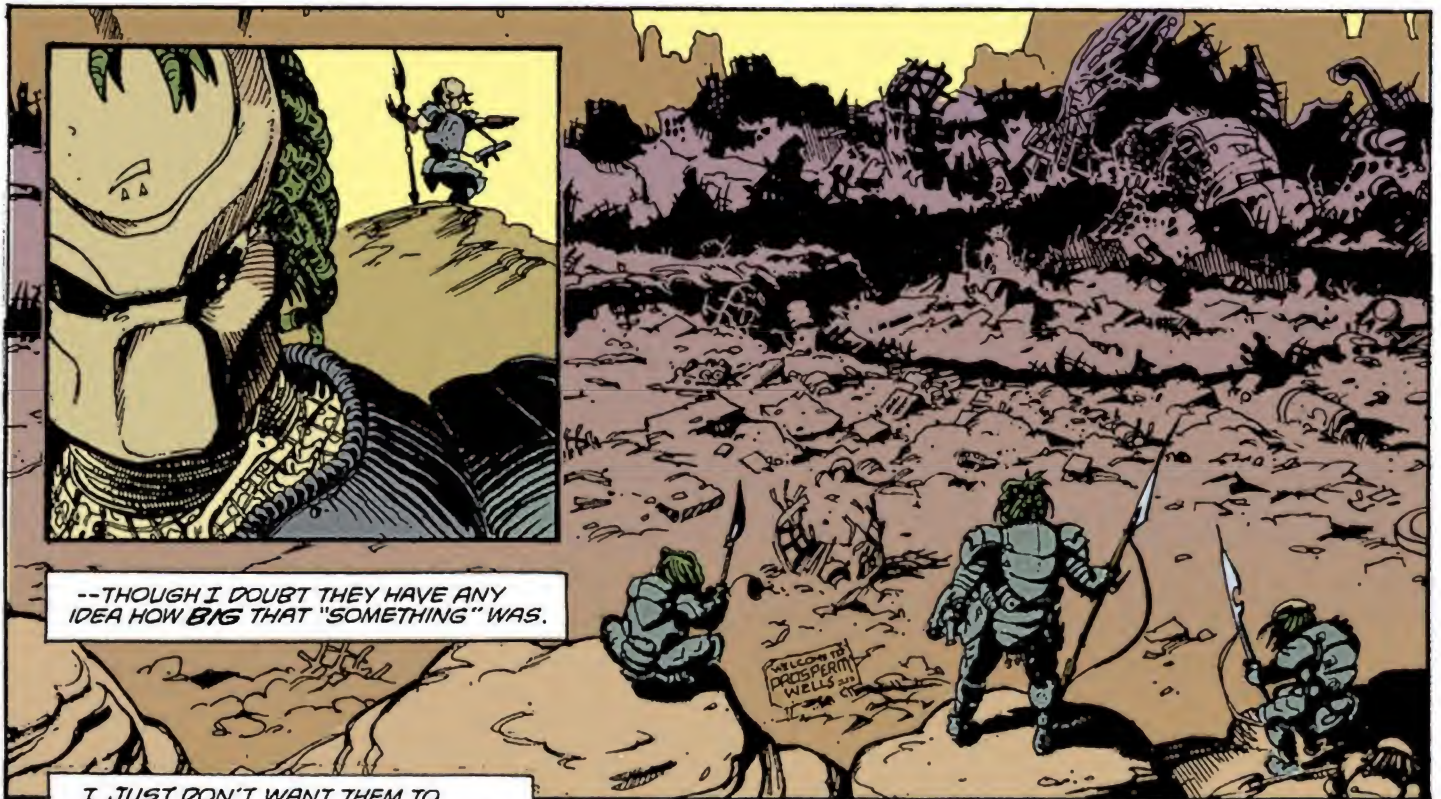


I MUST BE CRAZY. TWO YEARS ALONE
IN THE DESERT WILL DO THAT TO YOU.

THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT KIND
OF RECEPTION I'LL GET--BUT I
FEEL I OWE SOME KIND OF
EXPLANATION TO **BROKEN TUSK'S**
PEOPLE.



I'M SURE THEY FIGURED
SOMETHING WENT
WRONG WHEN **BROKEN**
TUSK AND HIS BOYS DIDN'T
COME HOME--



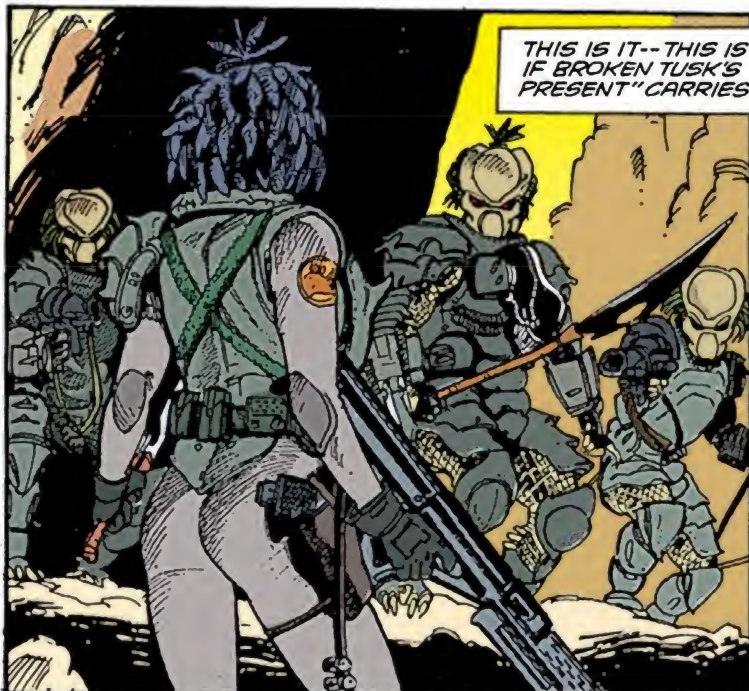
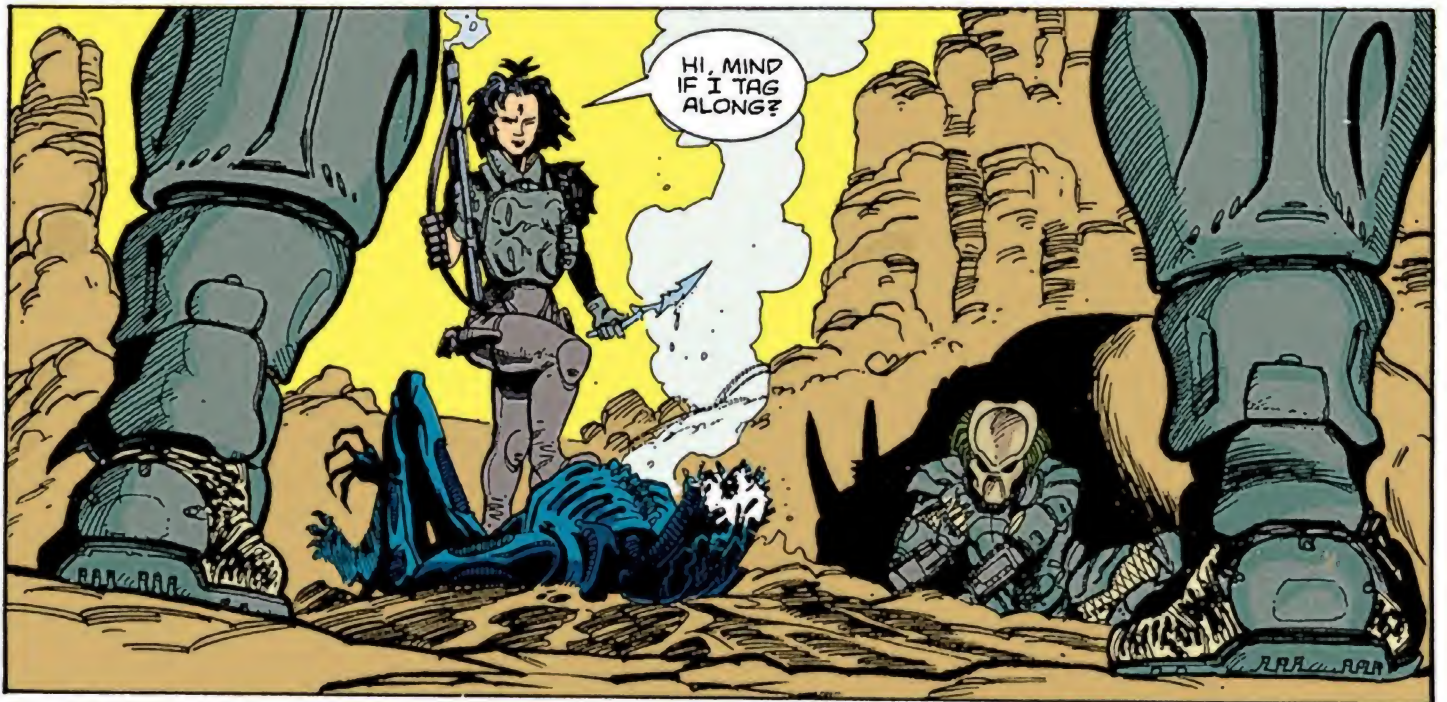
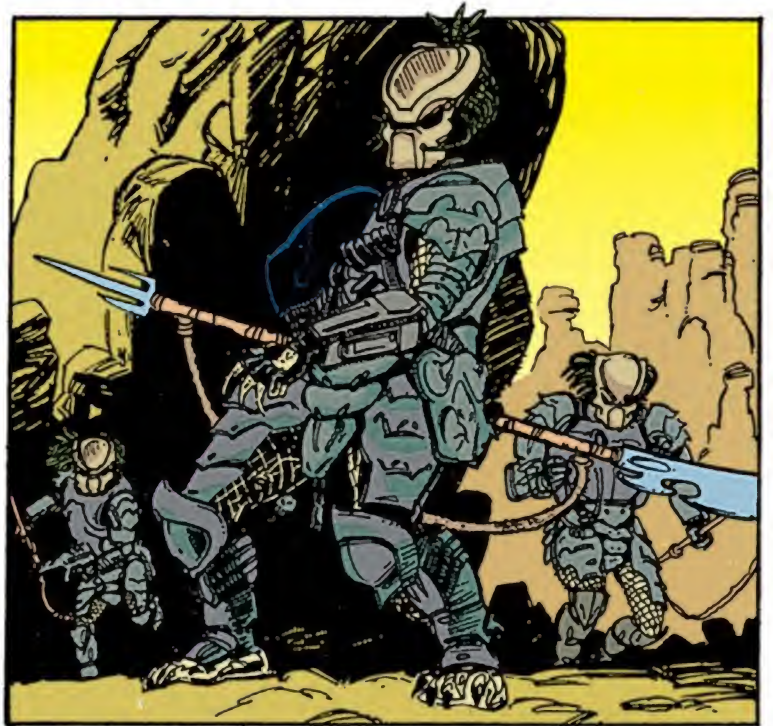
--THOUGH I DOUBT THEY HAVE ANY
IDEA HOW **BIG** THAT "SOMETHING" WAS.

I JUST DON'T WANT THEM TO
THINK **BROKEN TUSK** WAS A FAILURE.

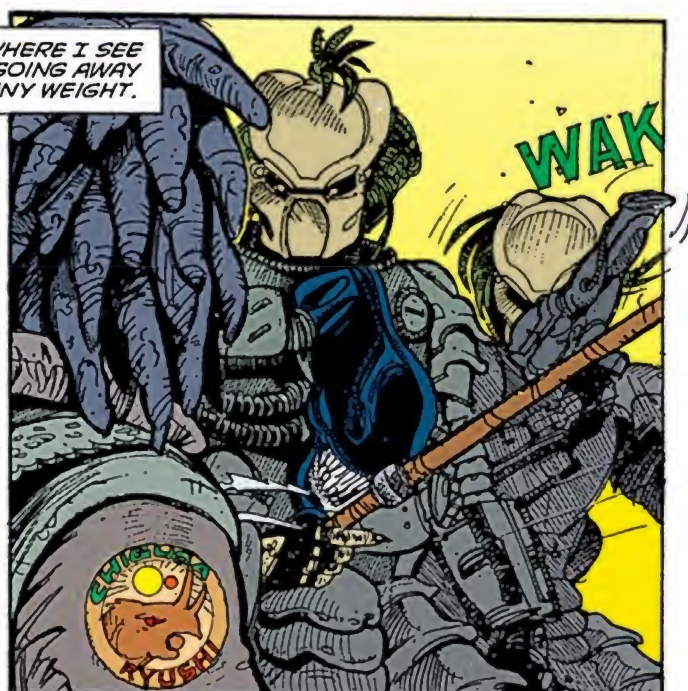




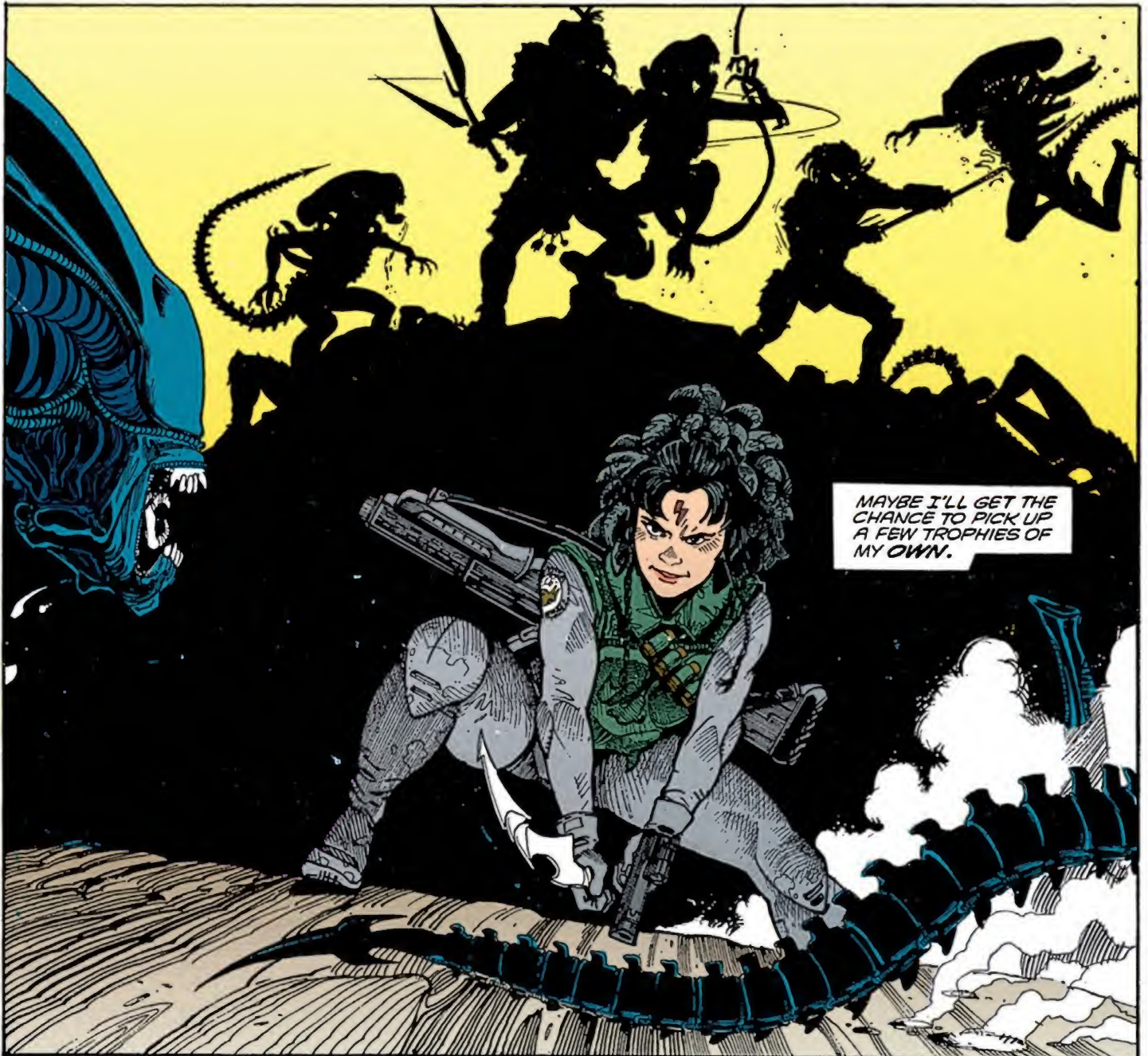




THIS IS IT--THIS IS WHERE I SEE IF BROKEN TUSK'S "GOING AWAY PRESENT" CARRIES ANY WEIGHT.



IF I DON'T END UP A TROPHY ON SOMEBODY'S WALL --



MAYBE I'LL GET THE
CHANCE TO PICK UP
A FEW TROPHIES OF
MY OWN.

BLOOD TIME



script
RANDY STRADLEY

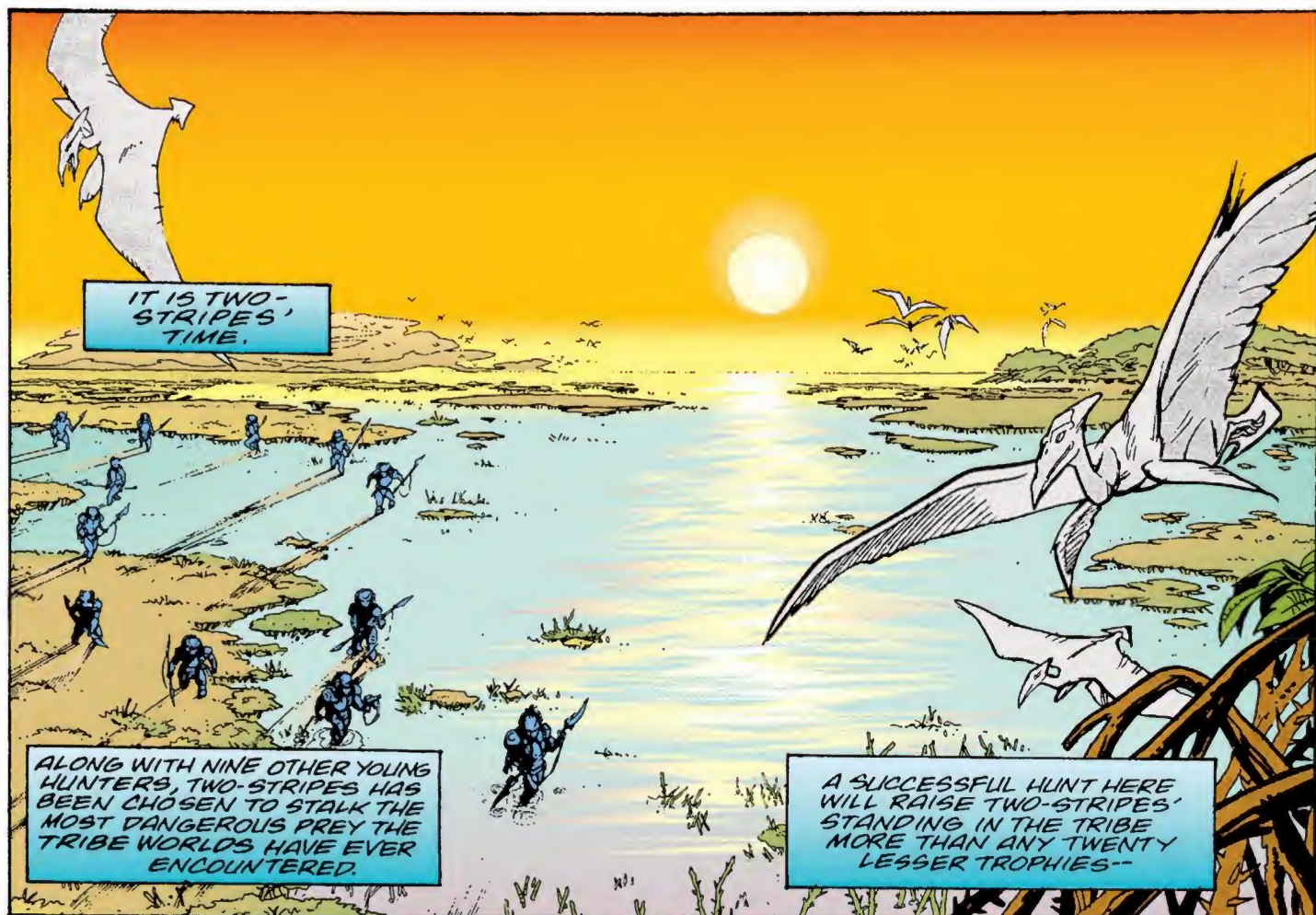
art
PHILL NORWOOD

colors
FRANK LOPEZ

lettering
VICKIE WILLIAMS

title illustration
RICHARD CORBEN

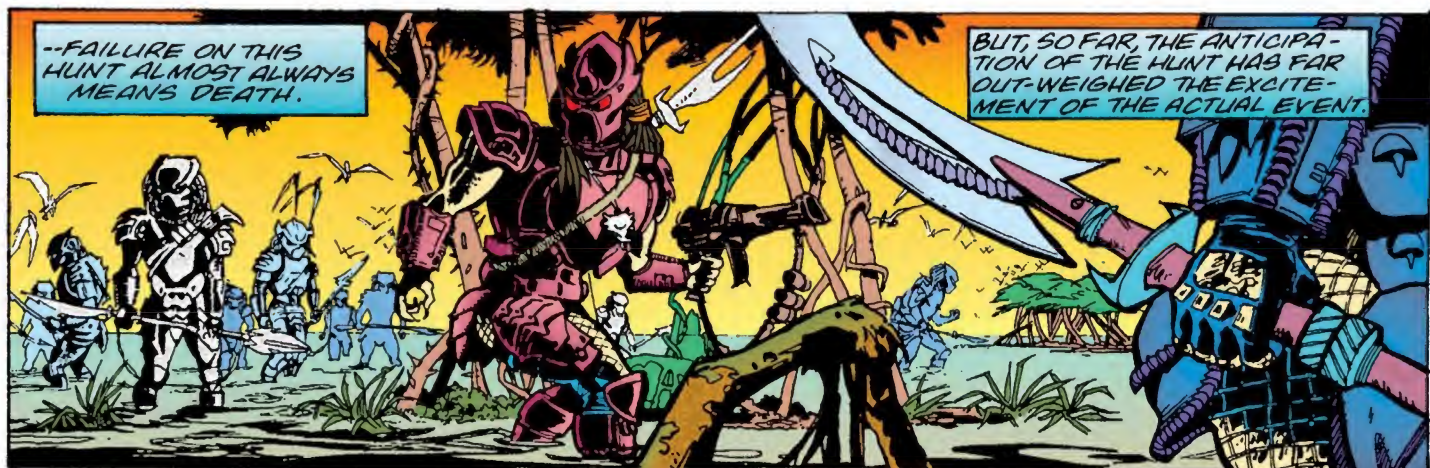




IT IS TWO-STRIPES' TIME.

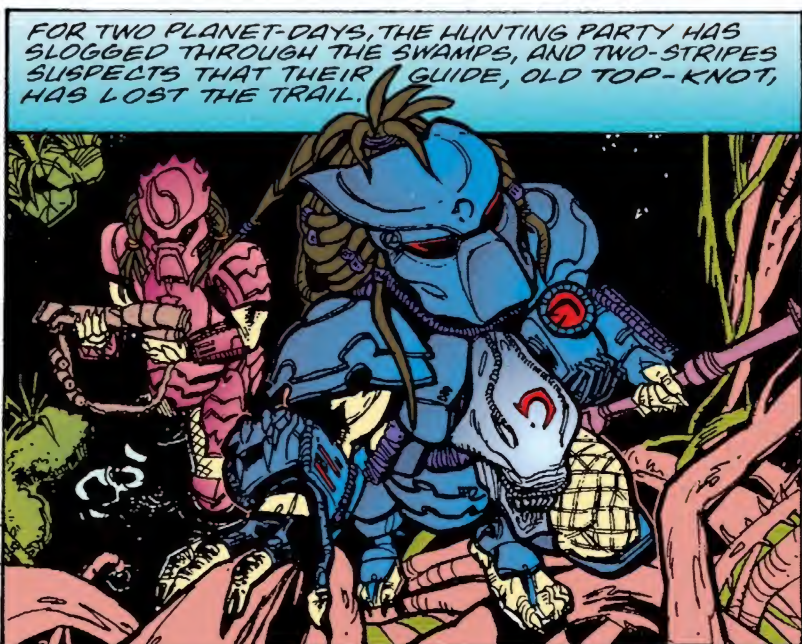
ALONG WITH NINE OTHER YOUNG HUNTERS, TWO-STRIPES HAS BEEN CHOSEN TO STALK THE MOST DANGEROUS PREY THE TRIBE WORLDS HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED.

A SUCCESSFUL HUNT HERE WILL RAISE TWO-STRIPES' STANDING IN THE TRIBE MORE THAN ANY TWENTY LESSER TROPHIES--



--FAILURE ON THIS HUNT ALMOST ALWAYS MEANS DEATH.

BUT, SO FAR, THE ANTICIPATION OF THE HUNT HAS FAR OUT-WEIGHED THE EXCITEMENT OF THE ACTUAL EVENT.



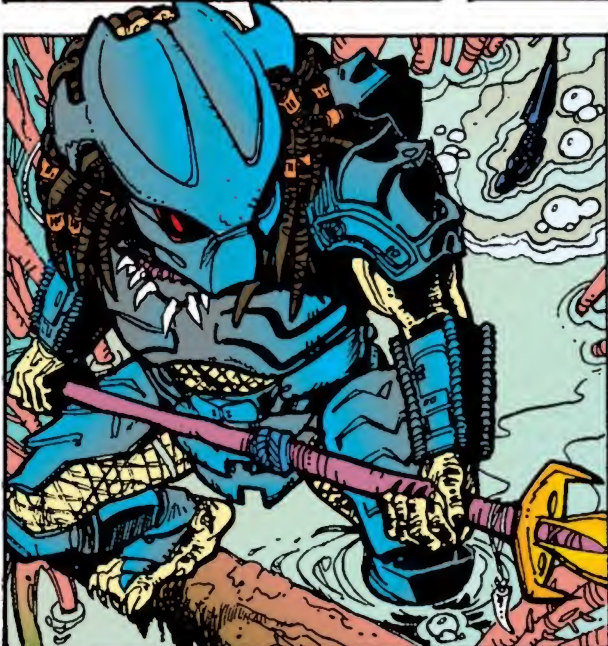
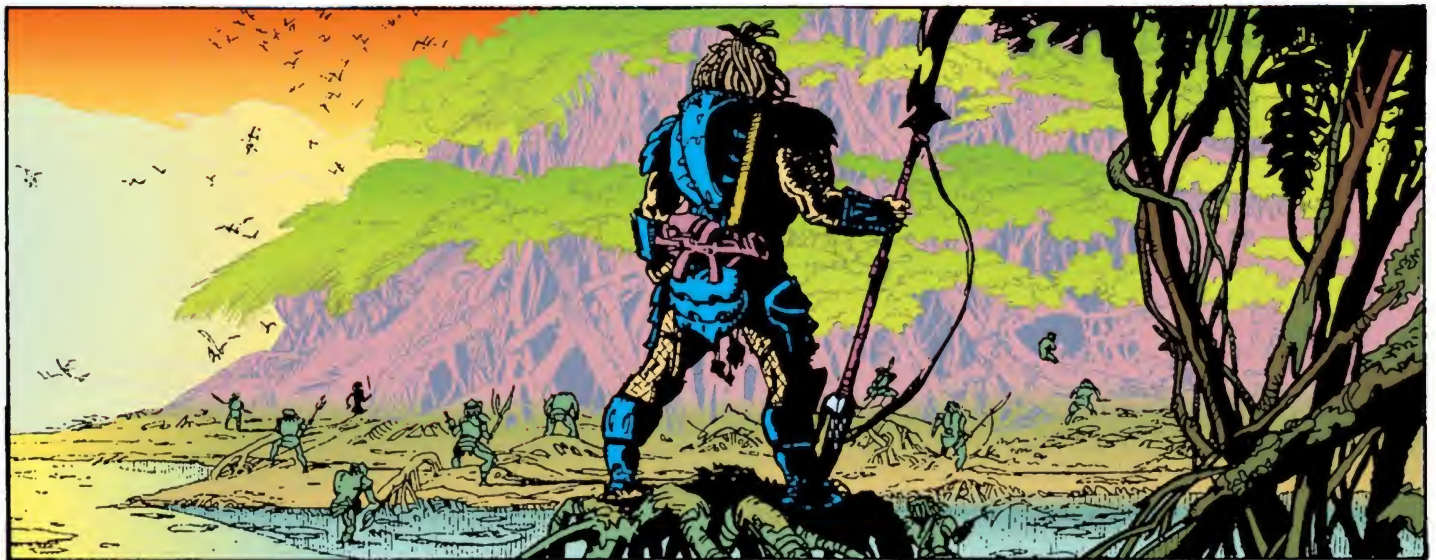
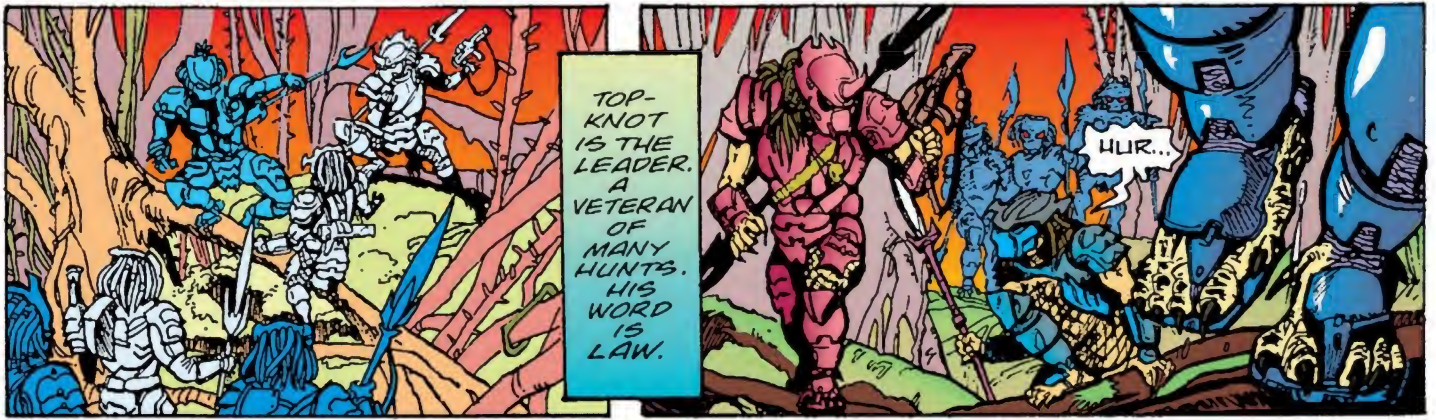
FOR TWO PLANET-DAYS, THE HUNTING PARTY HAS SLOGGED THROUGH THE SWAMPS, AND TWO-STRIPES SUSPECTS THAT THEIR GUIDE, OLD TOP-KNOT, HAS LOST THE TRAIL.

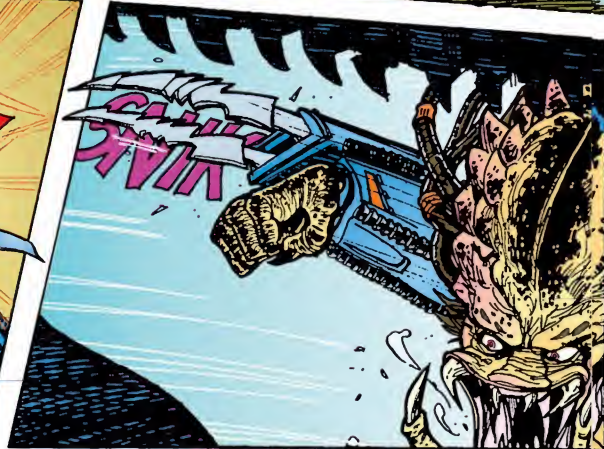
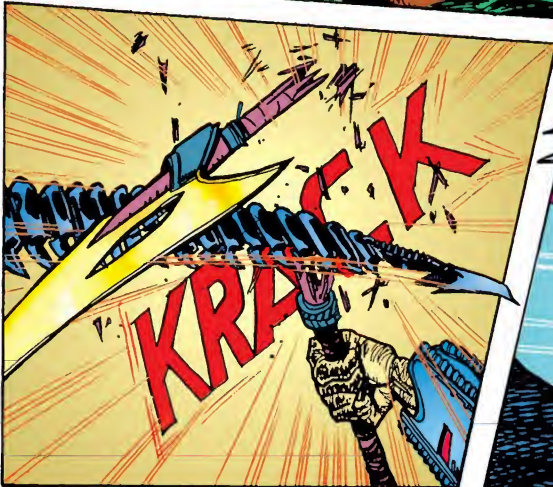
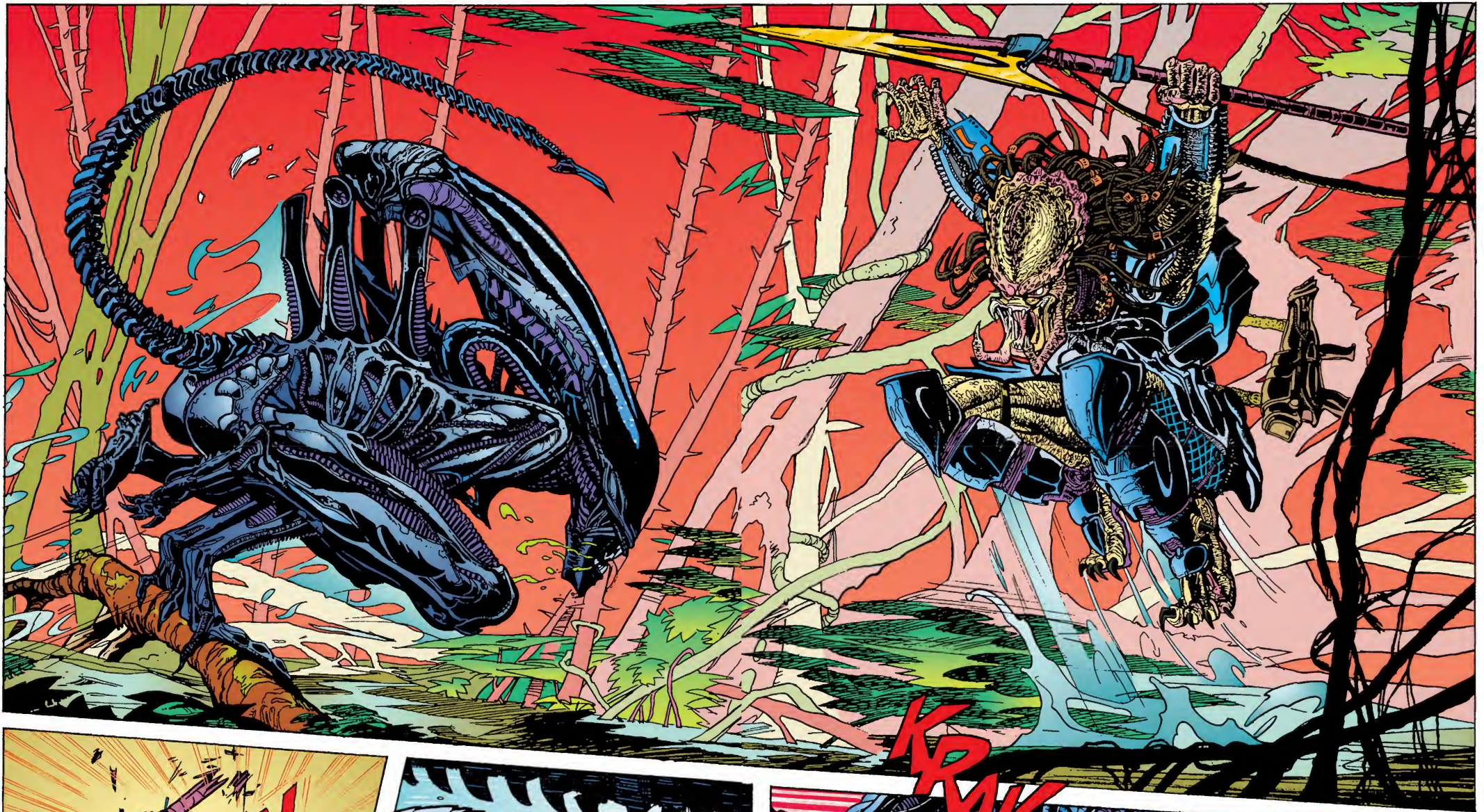


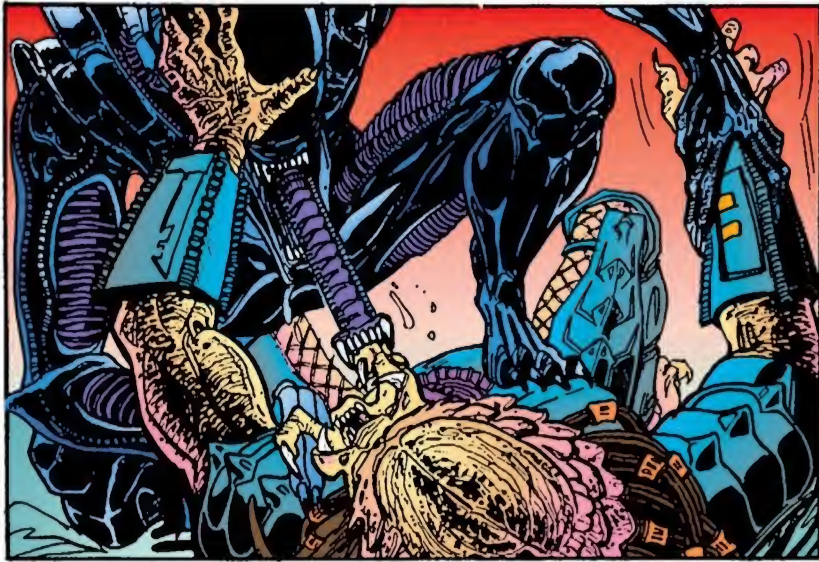
THEN LIGHT-STEPPER PROVES TWO-STRIPES WRONG.

K-KT-KT-T-T-T.

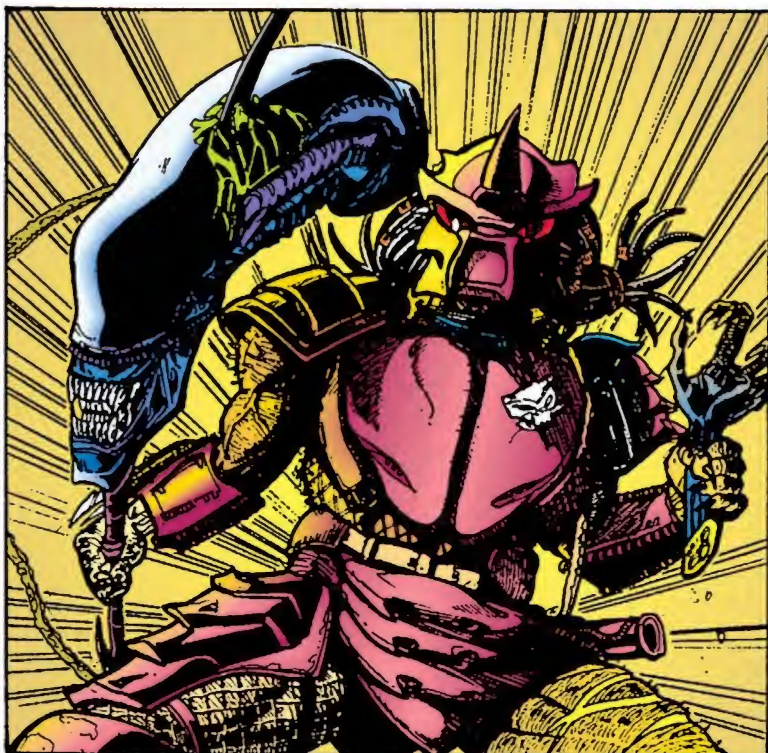
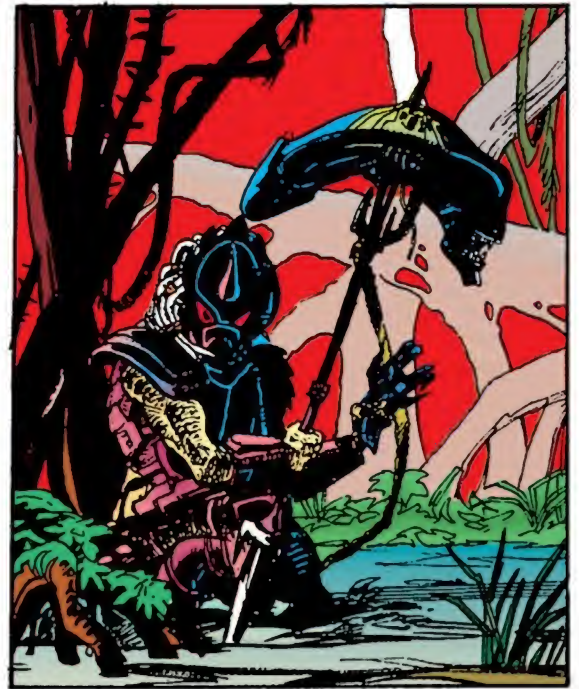
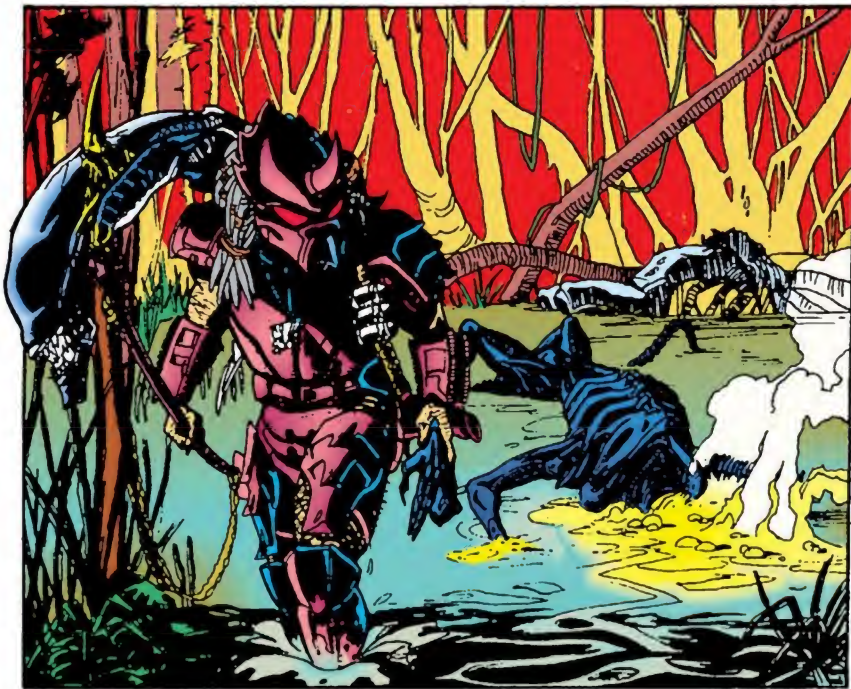


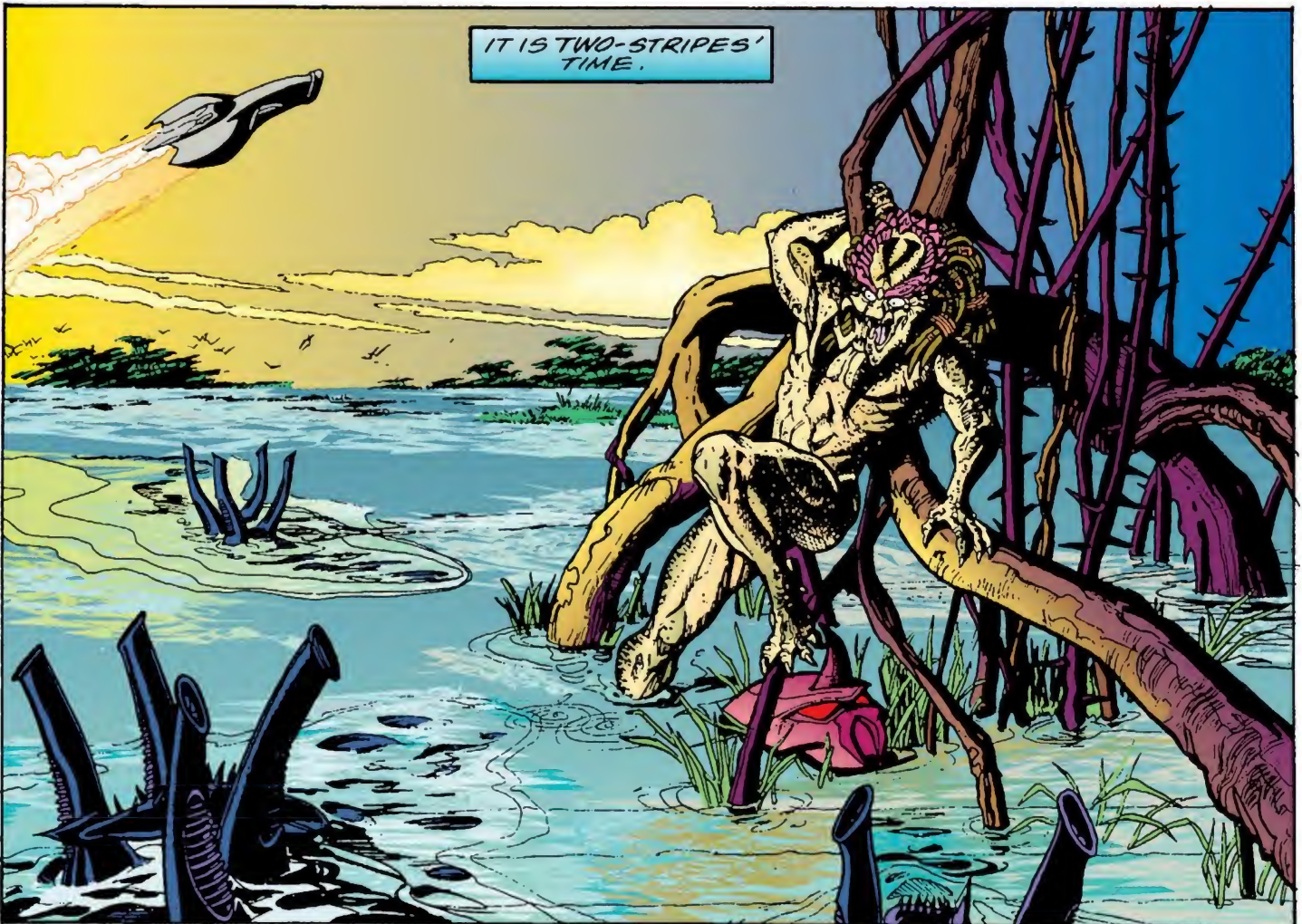
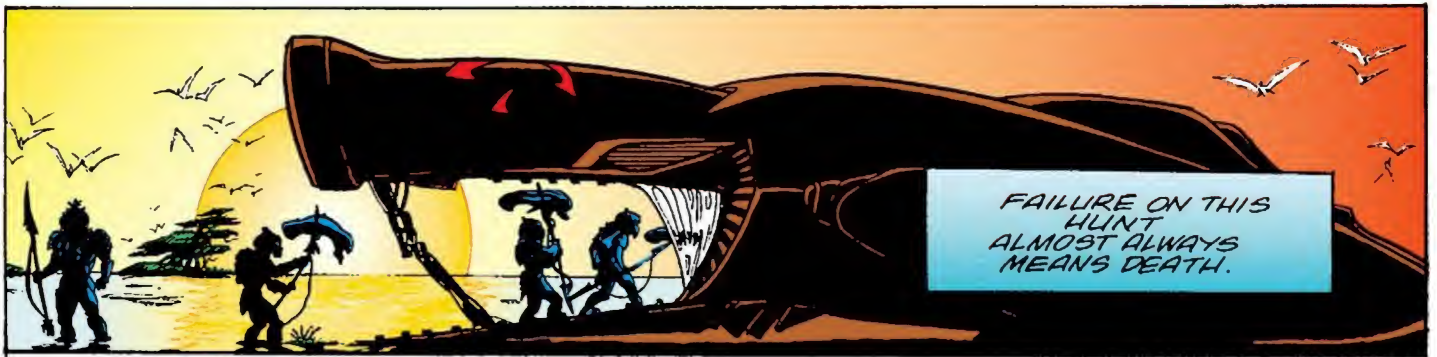
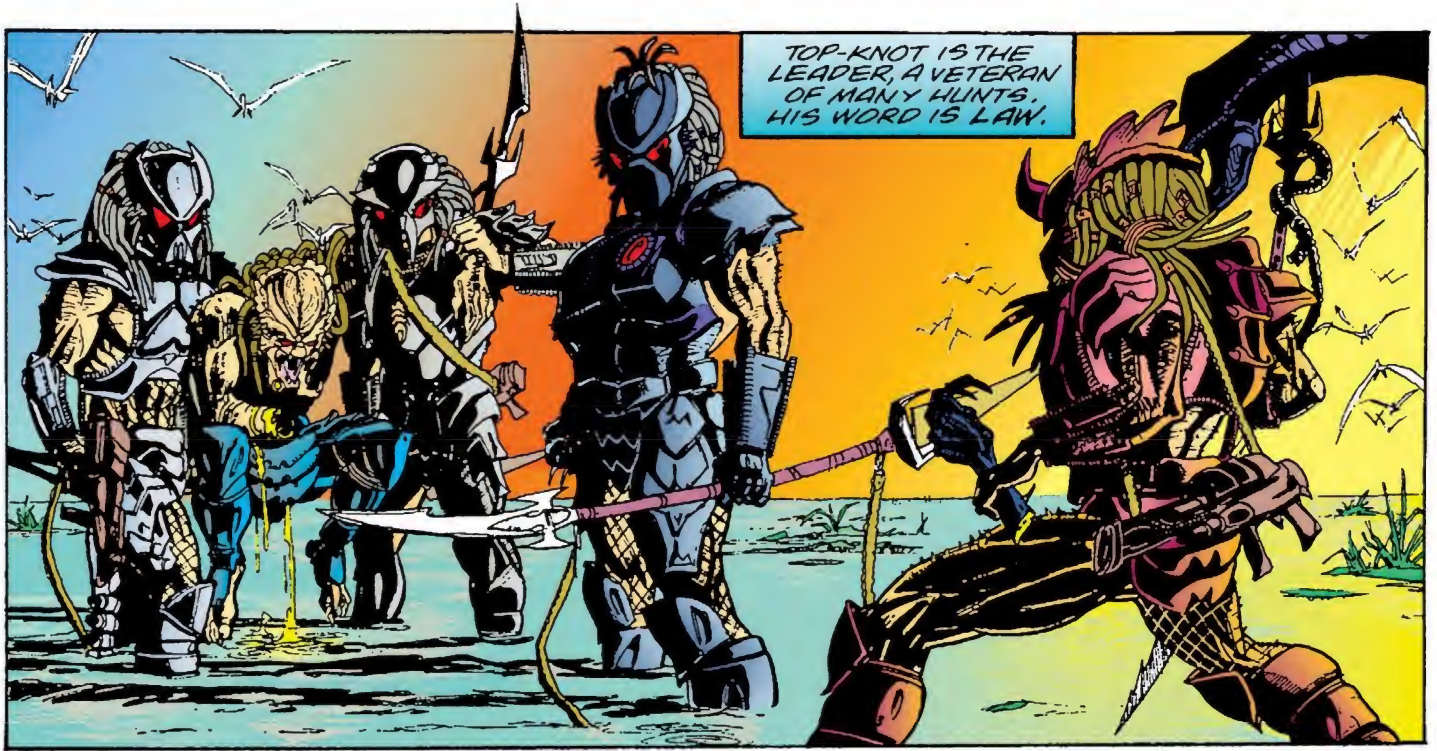






TWO-STRIPES KNOWS WHAT
MUST BE DONE,
AND TIME IS SHORT.





DUEL



script
RANDY STRADLEY

pencils
JAVIER SALTARES

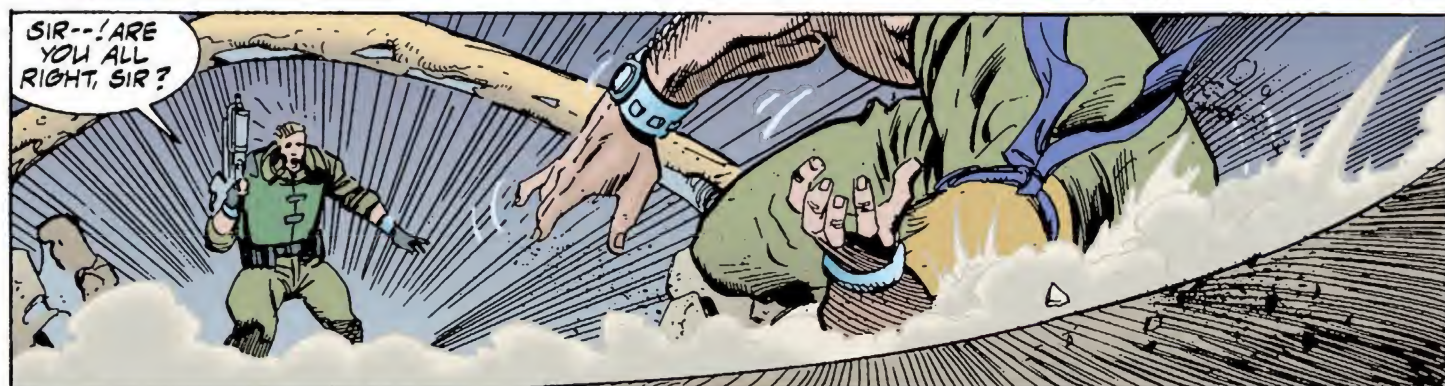
inks
JIMMY PALMIOTTI

colors
JAMES SINCLAIR

lettering
STEVE DUTRO

title illustration
CHRIS WARNER







BUT CHOOSE
WRONG--

NO!
DON'T
SHOOT--!

BLAM

BLAM



BLAM



CLICK



CLICK
CLICK

-- AND YOU
PAY FOR IT.



MY SQUAD HAD
BEEN PAYING
FOR IT SINCE
WE'D TOUCHED
DOWN ON
RYUSHI THIRTY-
SOME HOURS
AGO.



MMPH! MMP
MMBE!



CHOICES.



SOMETIMES IT'S
PRACTICALLY
IMPOSSIBLE TO
MAKE A GOOD
ONE.



AND SOMETIMES
THE DECISION IS
TAKEN OUT OF
YOUR HANDS.



--WE'VE GOT NO CHOICE, GLASS. THE COMPUTER'S 82% CERTAIN THE SIGNAL IS A DISTRESS CALL. WE HAVE TO RESPOND.

I ASKED YOU NOT TO TELL ME THAT. GREAT.



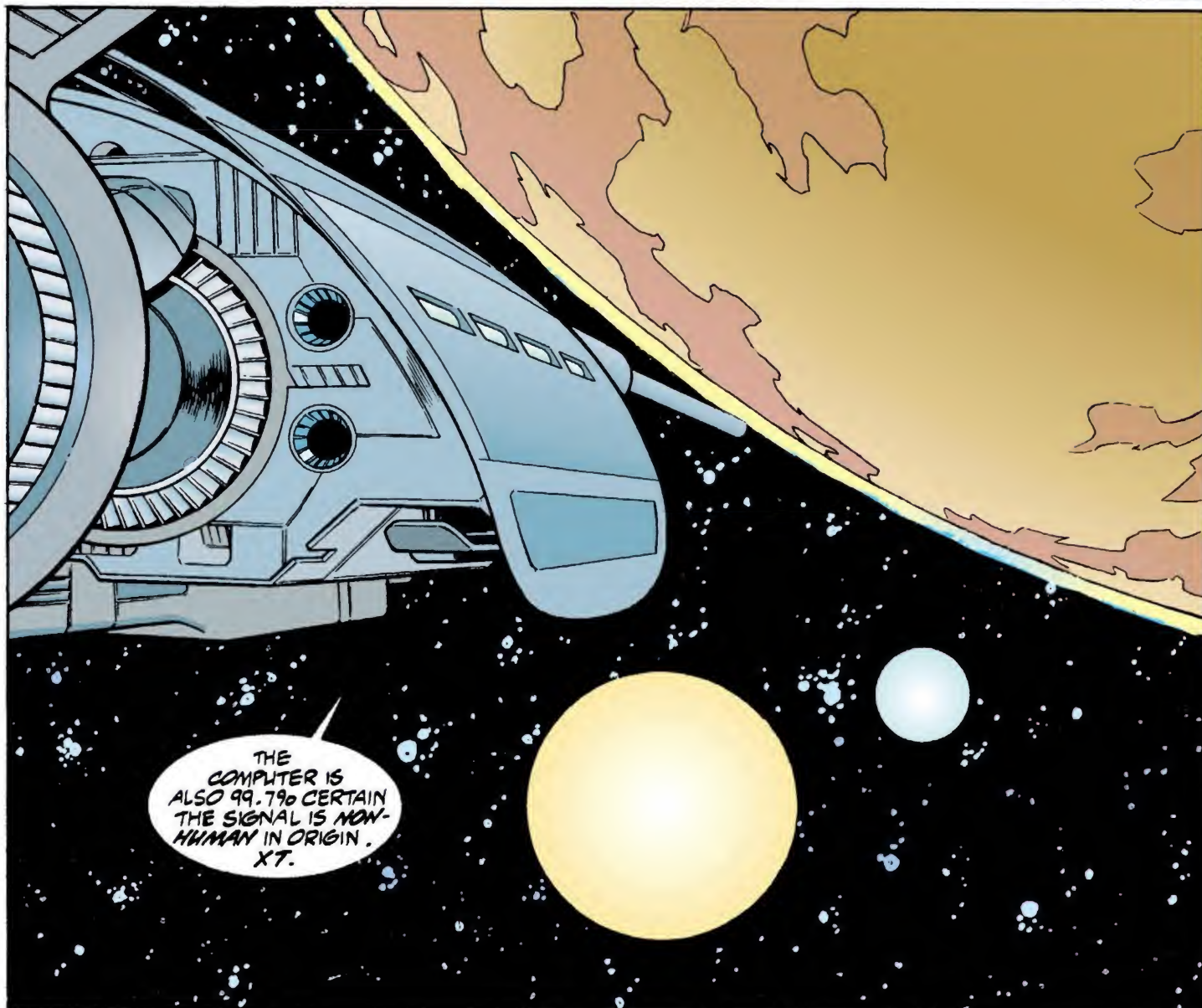
MURPHY, TAKE US IN.

ROGER, CAPTAIN.

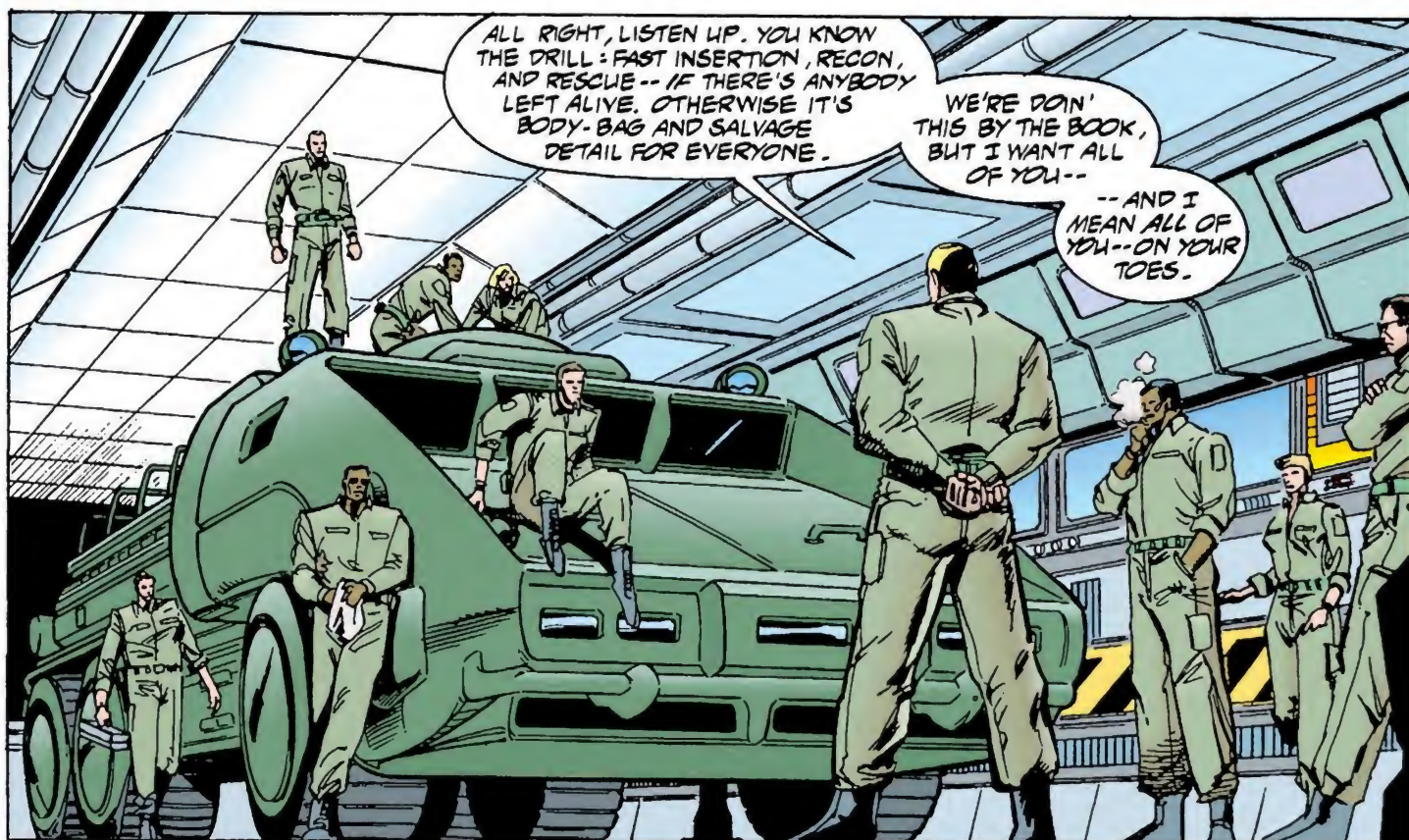
LESSER, SEE WHAT INFO THE CORPS HAS ON--WHAT DID YOU CALL THIS DUST-BALL?

RYUKSHI, SIR. I'M ALREADY PULLING UP THE FILES.

YOU READY FOR THE REALLY GOOD NEWS?



THE COMPUTER IS ALSO 99.79% CERTAIN THE SIGNAL IS NON-HUMAN IN ORIGIN. X7.



ALL RIGHT, LISTEN UP. YOU KNOW THE DRILL: FAST INSERTION, RECON, AND RESCUE -- IF THERE'S ANYBODY LEFT ALIVE. OTHERWISE IT'S BODY-BAG AND SALVAGE DETAIL FOR EVERYONE.

WE'RE DOIN' THIS BY THE BOOK, BUT I WANT ALL OF YOU--

-- AND I MEAN ALL OF YOU-- ON YOUR TOES.



SALI AND HIS COMPUTER SAY THIS DISTRESS SIGNAL IS XT IN ORIGIN.

THAT MEANS BUGS, DOESN'T IT, SIR?



WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS, MEGYESI. THAT'S WHY WE'RE EXTRA CAREFUL THIS TRIP, GOT IT?

SIR, WE WERE ALL DRILLED ON THE "ACHERON FIASCO" AT THE ACADEMY. THAT INCIDENT STARTED WITH AN XT DISTRESS CALL--



THANKS FOR THE HISTORY LESSON, REED. SINCE YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT WHAT WE'RE HEADING INTO, YOU CAN WALK POINT. NOW, IF YOU PH.D.S ARE READY TO LISTEN...

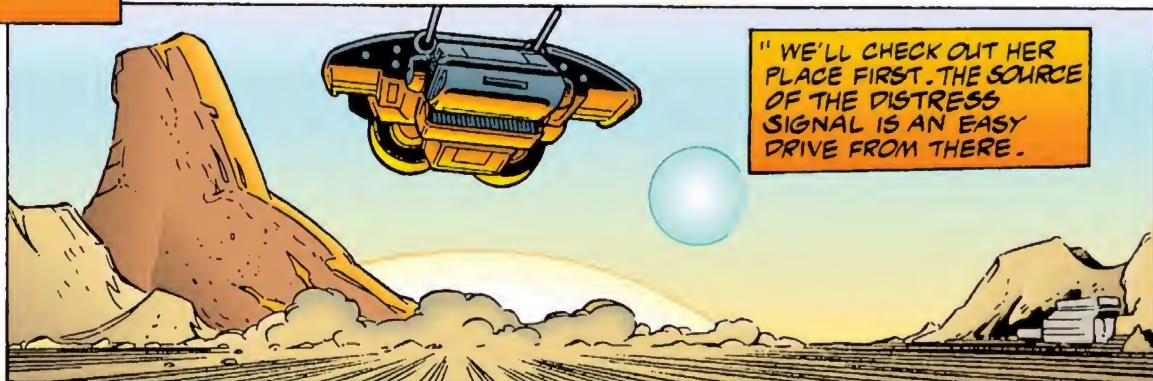
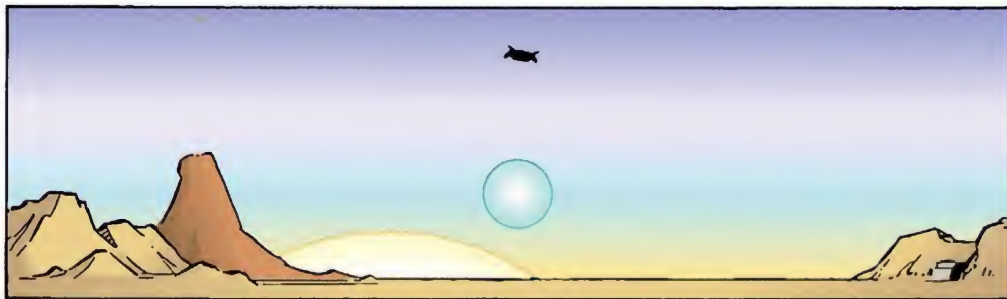
SGT. LESSER?

HERE'S WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT RYLISHI...

" THE PLANET IS CLAIMED BY THE CHIGUSA CORPORATION , BUT THEY DON'T SEEM TO KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT . TOO HOT . TOO DRY . TOO FAR FROM THE CORE COLONIES .

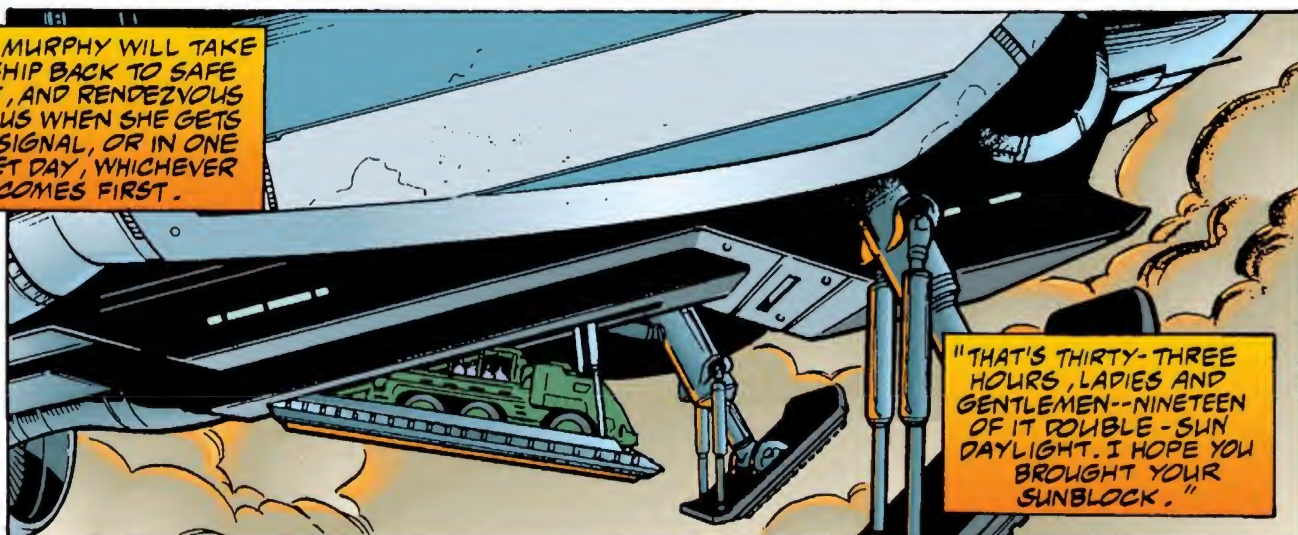
" THEY TRIED SETTLING IT , BUT GAVE UP ON IT FOR SOME REASON . NOW THERE'S ONLY ONE HUMAN INHABITANT LISTED --

" -- A MACHIKO NOGUCHI -- AND WE'VE BEEN UNABLE TO CONTACT HER .

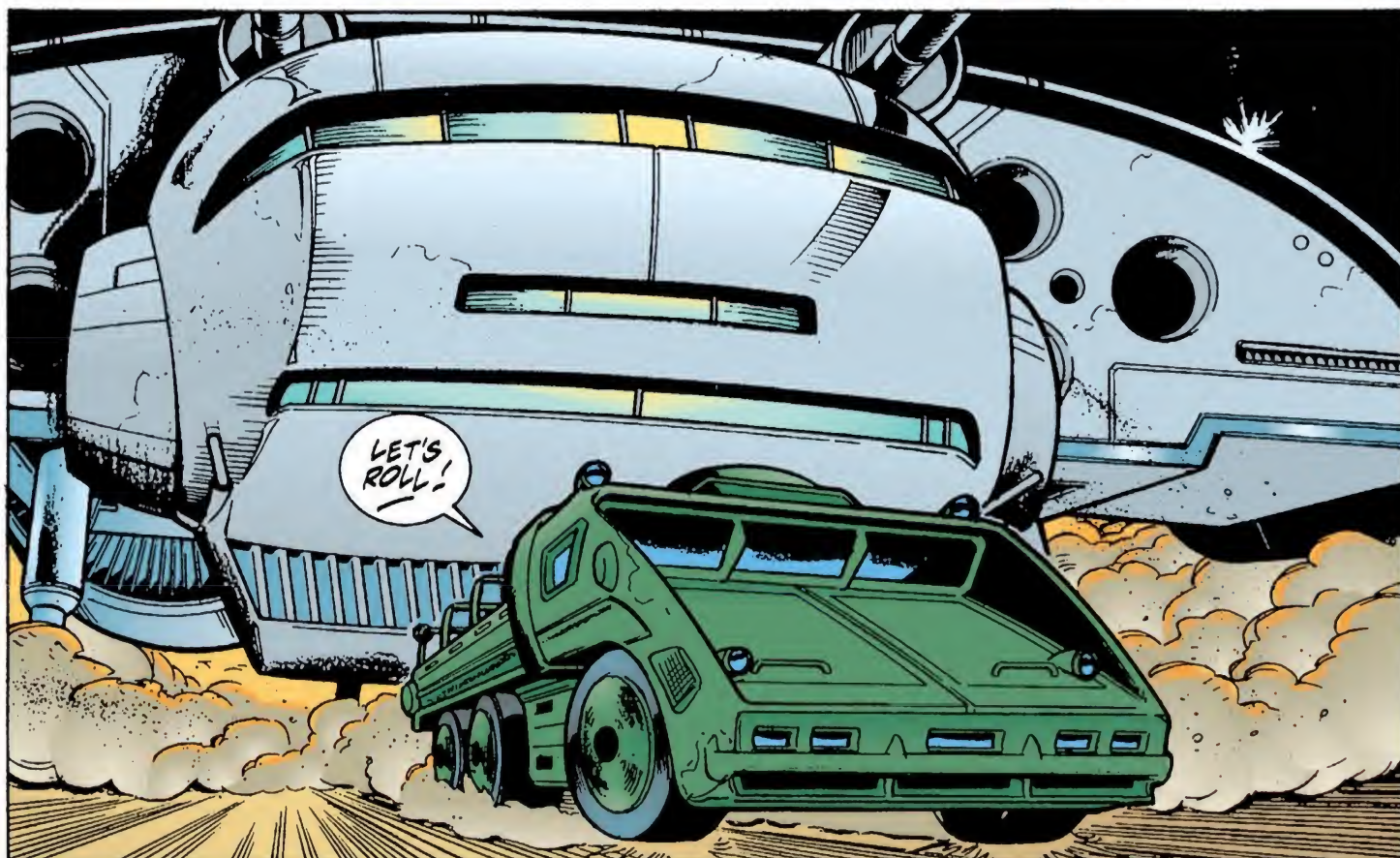


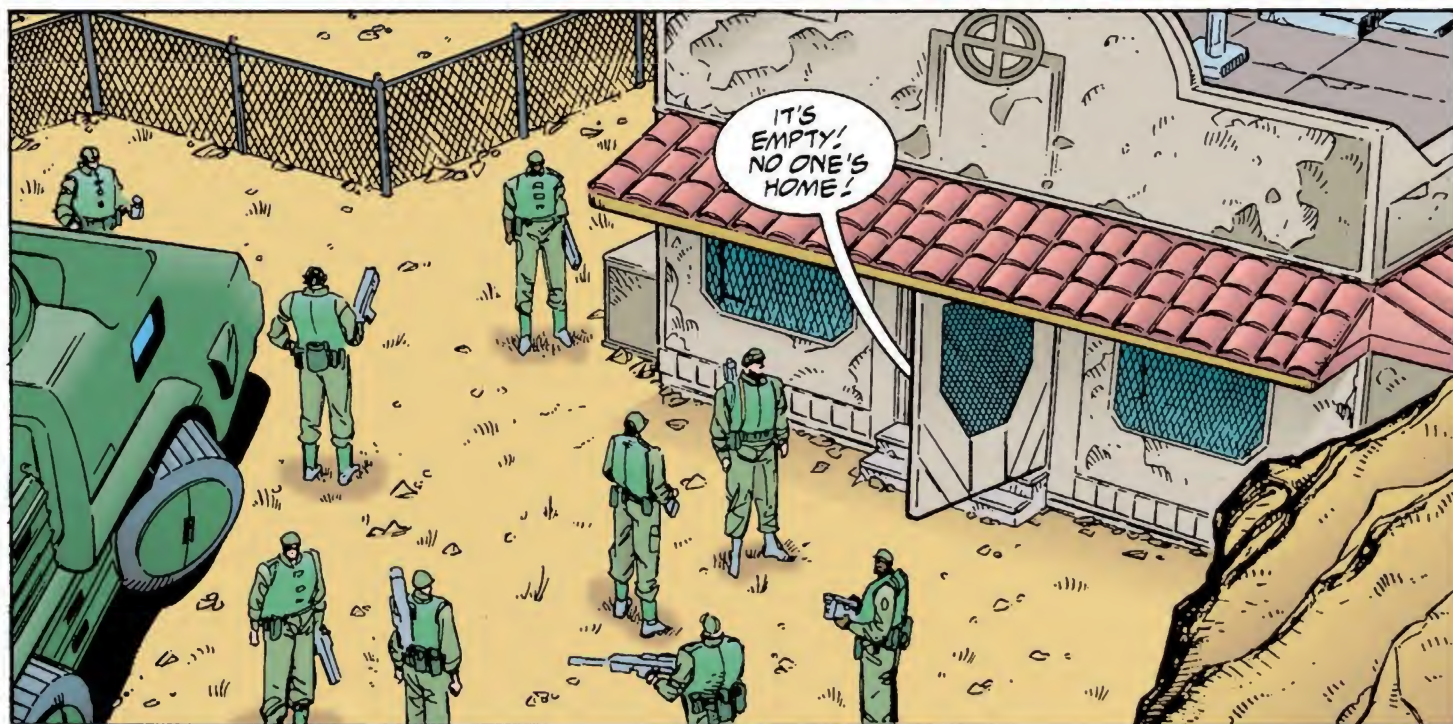
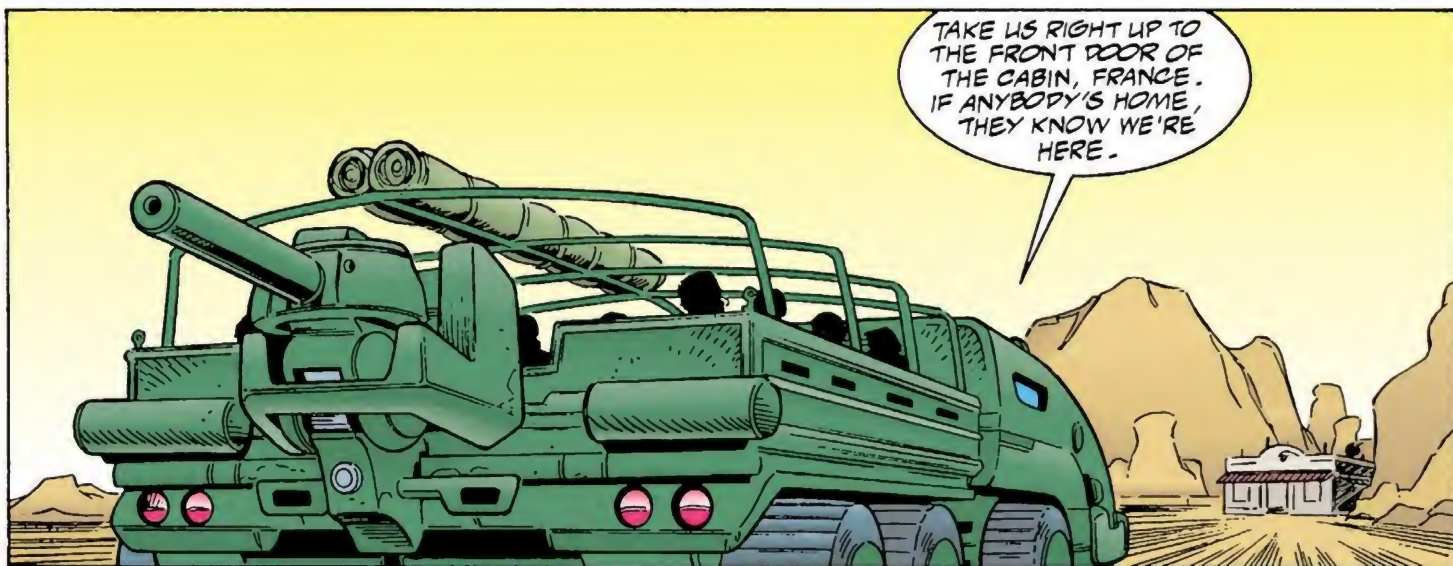
" WE'LL CHECK OUT HER PLACE FIRST . THE SOURCE OF THE DISTRESS SIGNAL IS AN EASY DRIVE FROM THERE .

" LT. MURPHY WILL TAKE THE SHIP BACK TO SAFE ORBIT , AND RENDEZVOUS WITH US WHEN SHE GETS OUR SIGNAL , OR IN ONE PLANET DAY , WHICHEVER COMES FIRST .



" THAT'S THIRTY-THREE HOURS , LADIES AND GENTLEMEN -- NINETEEN OF IT ROUBLE - SUN DAYLIGHT . I HOPE YOU BROUGHT YOUR SUNBLOCK . "







MAN, HOW MUCH HOTTER IS IT GONNA GET?

HEAT GETTING TO YOU, BOWEN? MAYBE YOU'D LIKE A NICE MOIST HANKY TO PUT ON YOUR FOREHEAD.



EIGHTY-SIX THAT BELLYACHING AND KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED!

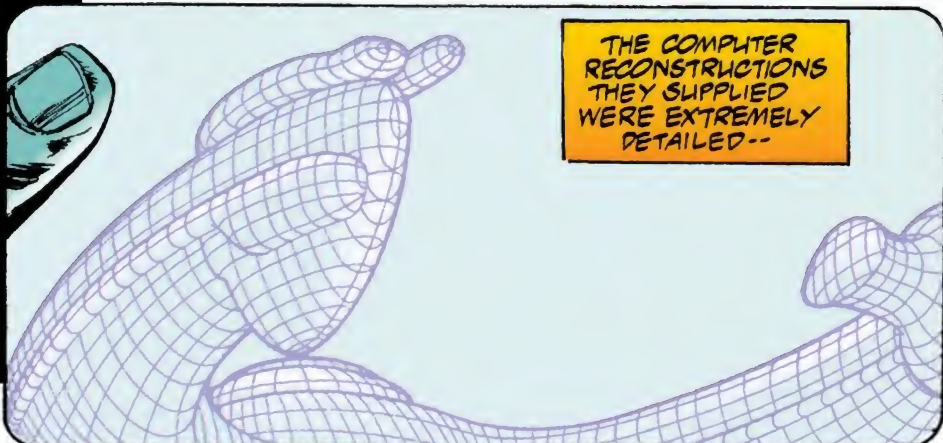


THAT GOES FOR THE REST OF YOU, TOO! YOU ALL KNOW WHAT TO LOOK FOR.

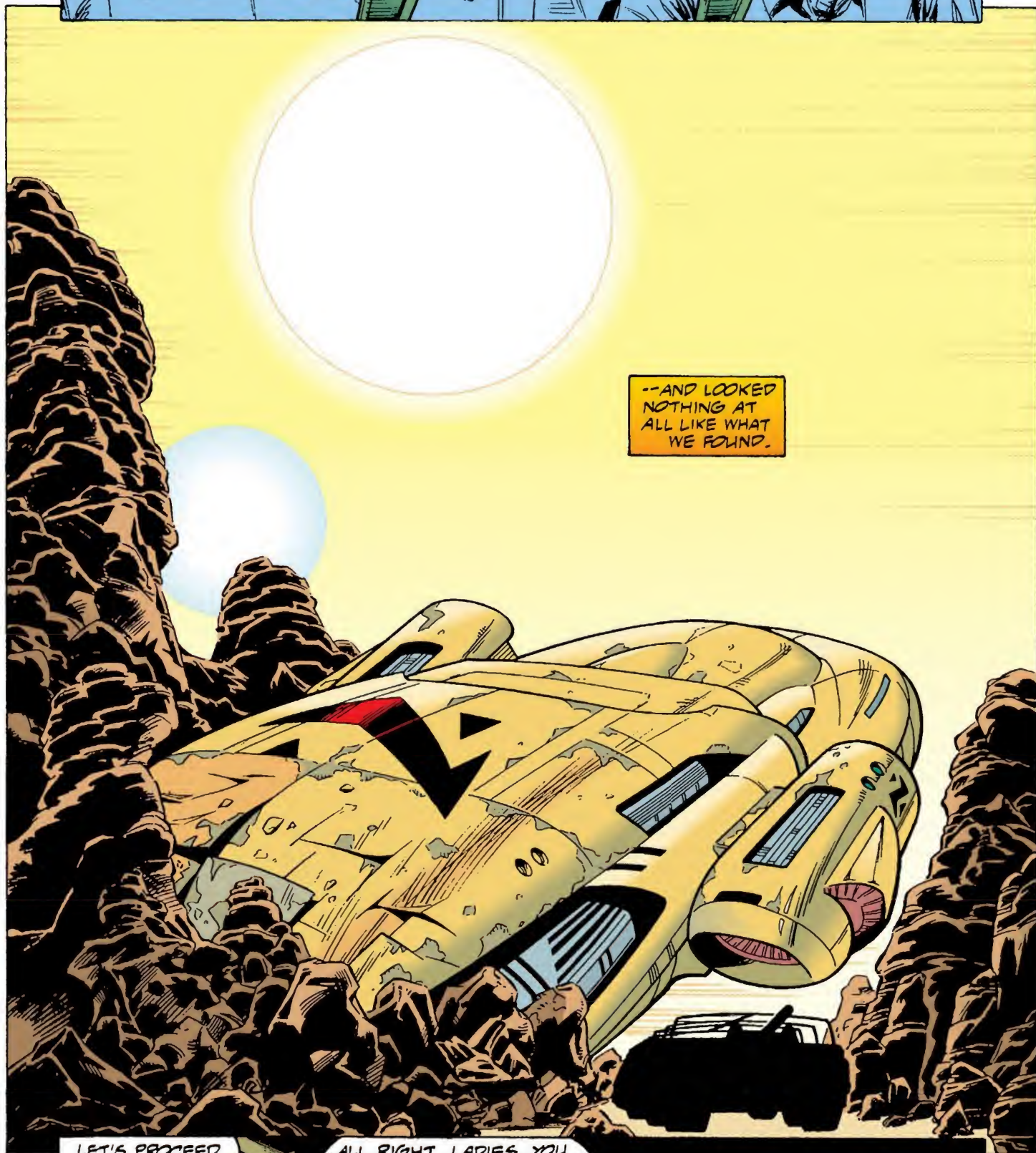
EVERY MARINE ACROSS THE GALAXY KNEW WHAT TO LOOK FOR. AFTER THE "ACHERON FIASCO" AND A COUPLE OF OTHER INCIDENTS, THE CORPS FORCED WEYLAN-YUTANI TO COUGH UP WHAT THEY KNEW ABOUT THE BUGS.



THE COMPANY DIDN'T LIKE IT MUCH, BUT THEY WANTED MARINE PROTECTION FOR THEIR COLONIES.



THE COMPUTER RECONSTRUCTIONS THEY SUPPLIED WERE EXTREMELY DETAILED--



--AND LOOKED
NOTHING AT
ALL LIKE WHAT
WE FOUND.

LET'S PROCEED
WITH CAUTION,
SERGEANT.

ALL RIGHT, LADIES. YOU
HEARD THE CAPTAIN. BY
THE BOOK. PAIR UP.
SAFETIES OFF. FINGERS
OFF THE TRIGGER.









CAREFUL. LOOKS
LIKE IT GETS NARROW
UP AHEAD--



WHOA, WHAT'S
THAT?

IT AL-ALMOST
LOOKS HUMAN!



LOOK
AGAIN, KID.
THESE GUYS
WOULD GIVE
UGLY A BAD
NAME.

AT LEAST
WE KNOW WHAT
THAT BRIAR
WOLF WAS
EATING.

BUT THAT
THING LOOKED
HALF-STARVED.
WHY DIDN'T IT
LEAVE THE SHIP
TO FIND MORE
FOOD?



HEY! WE
FOUND
SOMETHING!



WE FOUND A NON-SURVIVOR. HULL CAVED IN AND CRUSHED 'IM. CORRIDOR DEAD ENDS. WHAT DO YOU HAVE HERE?

A LIVE ONE--I THINK.

ROGER THAT.



--AT LEAST FOR NOW. HIS... WH, HER... ITS BREATHING IS VERY RAGGED, BUT THERE ARE NO BROKEN BONES THAT I CAN FIND.



UGLY SON OF A BUCK. BUT I GUESS THAT WON'T MATTER TO THE BOYS AT XTR. A COUPLE OF YOU BUILD A LITTER. LET'S GET THIS GUY TO THE TRANSPORT.

YES, SIR.



THEY LOOK WORSE WITH THEIR SKIN ON.



SAY, SARGE? WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE THE BRIAR WOLF DIDN'T EAT THIS ONE?

WELL, I--



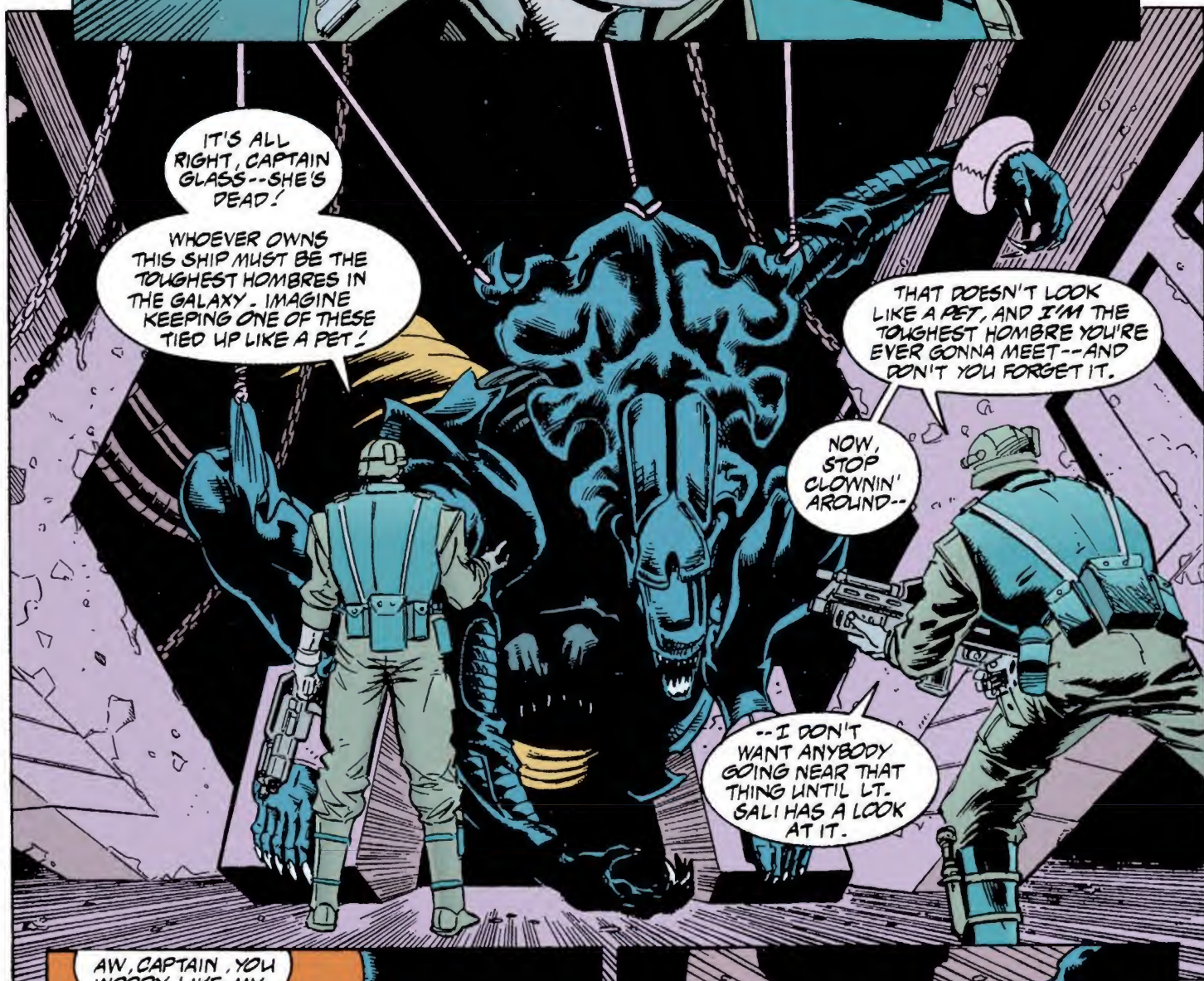
CAPTAIN! COME QUICK! YOU WON'T BELIEVE THIS!

NOW WHAT?



LOOK
WHAT I
FOUND,
CAPTAIN!

WHA--?
CARLSON,
GET AWAY
FROM THAT
THING!



IT'S ALL
RIGHT, CAPTAIN
GLASS--SHE'S
DEAD!

WHOEVER OWNS
THIS SHIP MUST BE THE
TOUGHEST HOMBRES IN
THE GALAXY. IMAGINE
KEEPING ONE OF THESE
TIED UP LIKE A PET!

THAT DOESN'T LOOK
LIKE A PET, AND I'M THE
TOUGHEST HOMBRE YOU'RE
EVER GONNA MEET--AND
DON'T YOU FORGET IT.

NOW,
STOP
CLOWNIN'
AROUND--

--I DON'T
WANT ANYBODY
GOING NEAR THAT
THING UNTIL LT.
SALI HAS A LOOK
AT IT.



AW, CAPTAIN, YOU
WORRY LIKE MY
MOMMA--



WHA--?!
YEAH!



SHUK







KEEP MOVING, COGELETTI!
GET TO THE ATV! THERE'RE
BUGS BACK THERE!

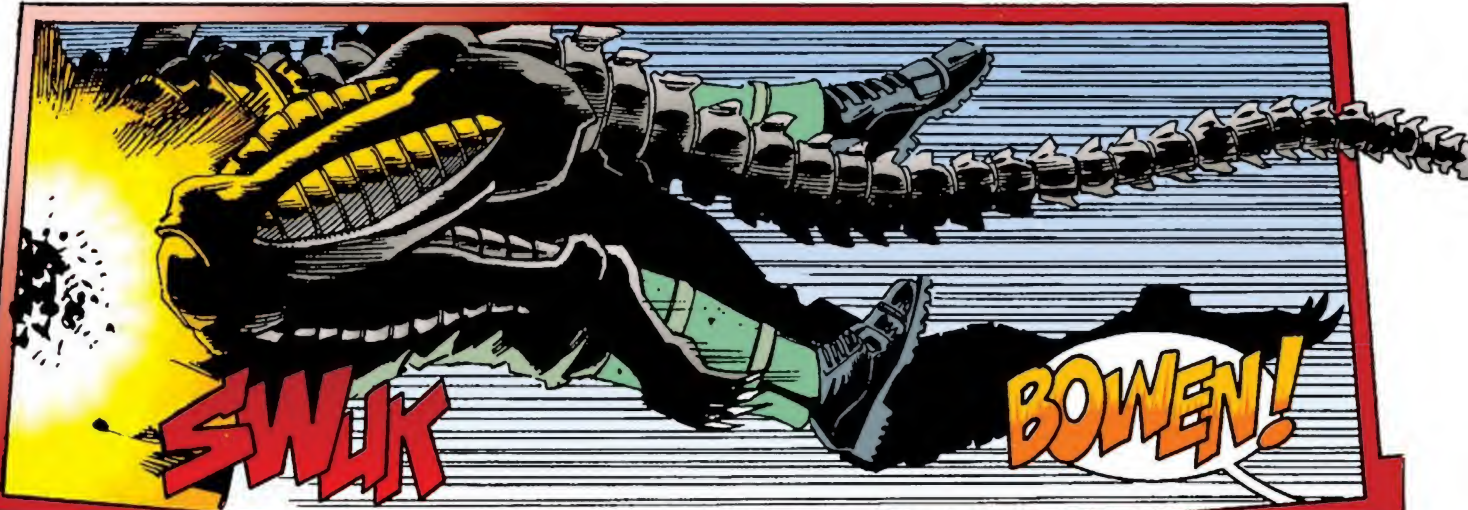
NO! WAIT
FOR THE
OTHERS TO
FORM UP.

DAMN IT,
BOWEN!
HOLD YOUR
POSITION!

--BUGS...!

NO, SIR...
I GOTTA
GET TO THE
ATV AND THE
BIG GUNS--

--I AIN'T GONNA
GO TOE TO TOE
WITH NO--



THIS
EXPLAINS WHY
THE BRIAR WOLF
STAYED INSIDE
THE SHIP...
YOU CAN GET IN,
BUT YOU CAN'T
GET OUT.

YEAH, WELL
THE WOLF WASN'T
ARMED WITH A
PULSE RIFLE.

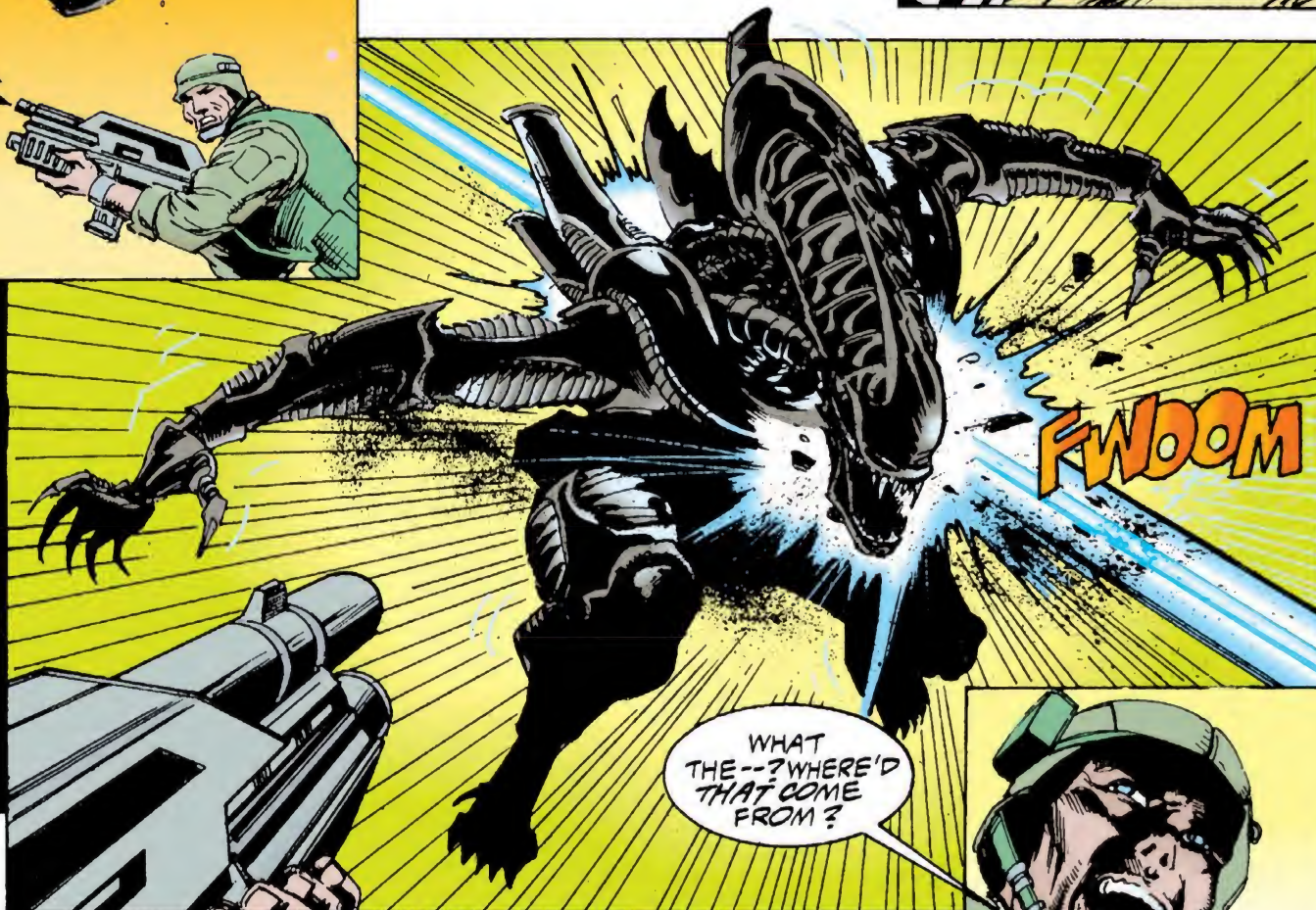
WE MOVE SLOWLY,
AND WE STAY TOGETHER,
SHOOT ANYTHING THAT
MOVES. WE'RE LEAVING,
AND THE BUGS AREN'T GOING
TO STOP US.



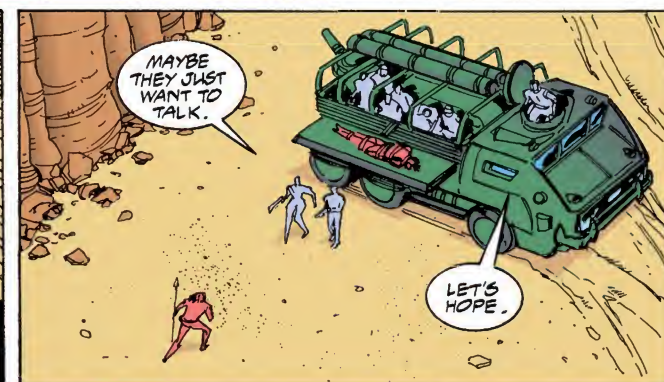
GO!

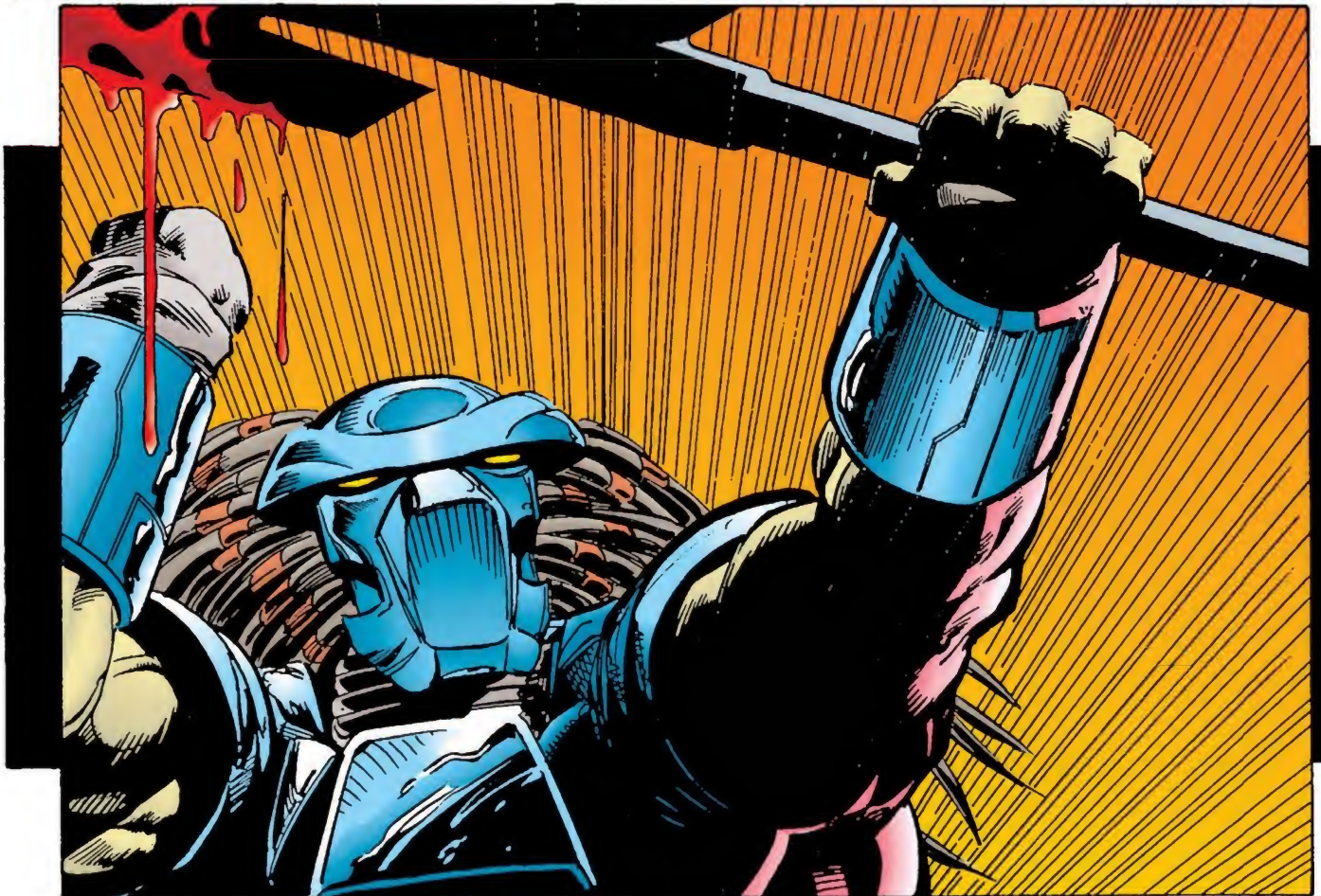
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM

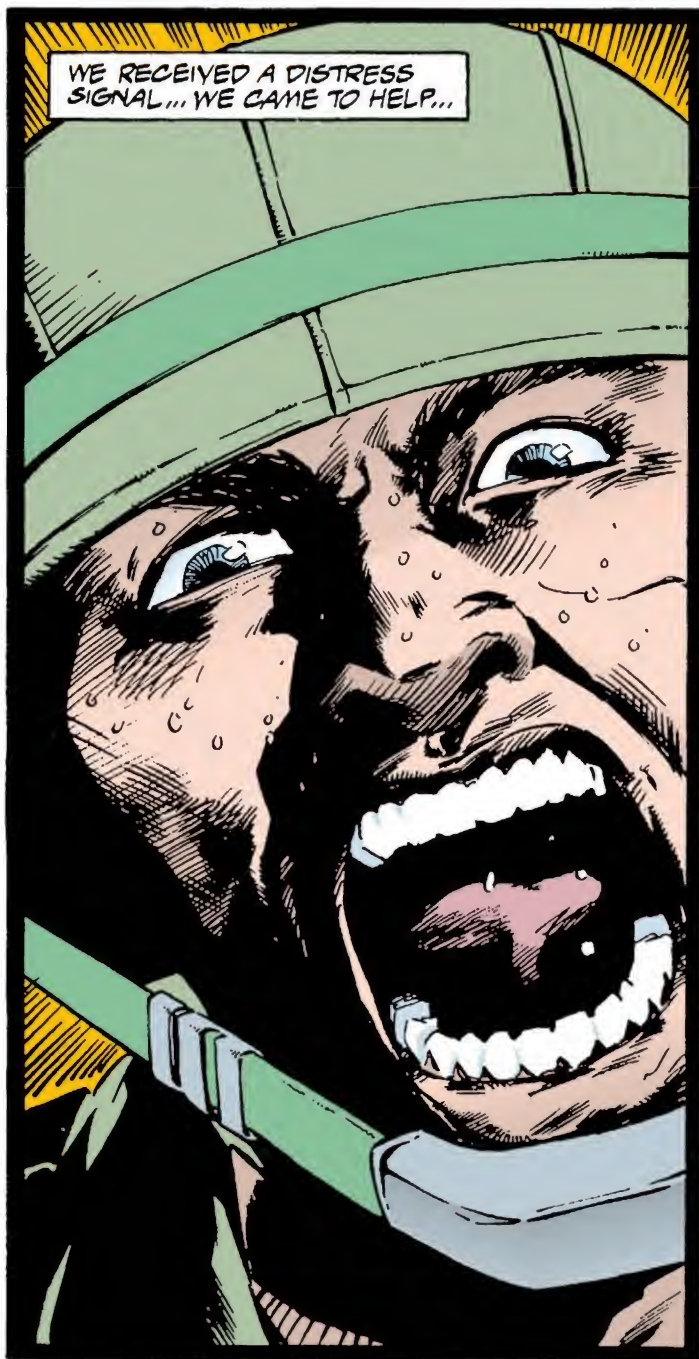




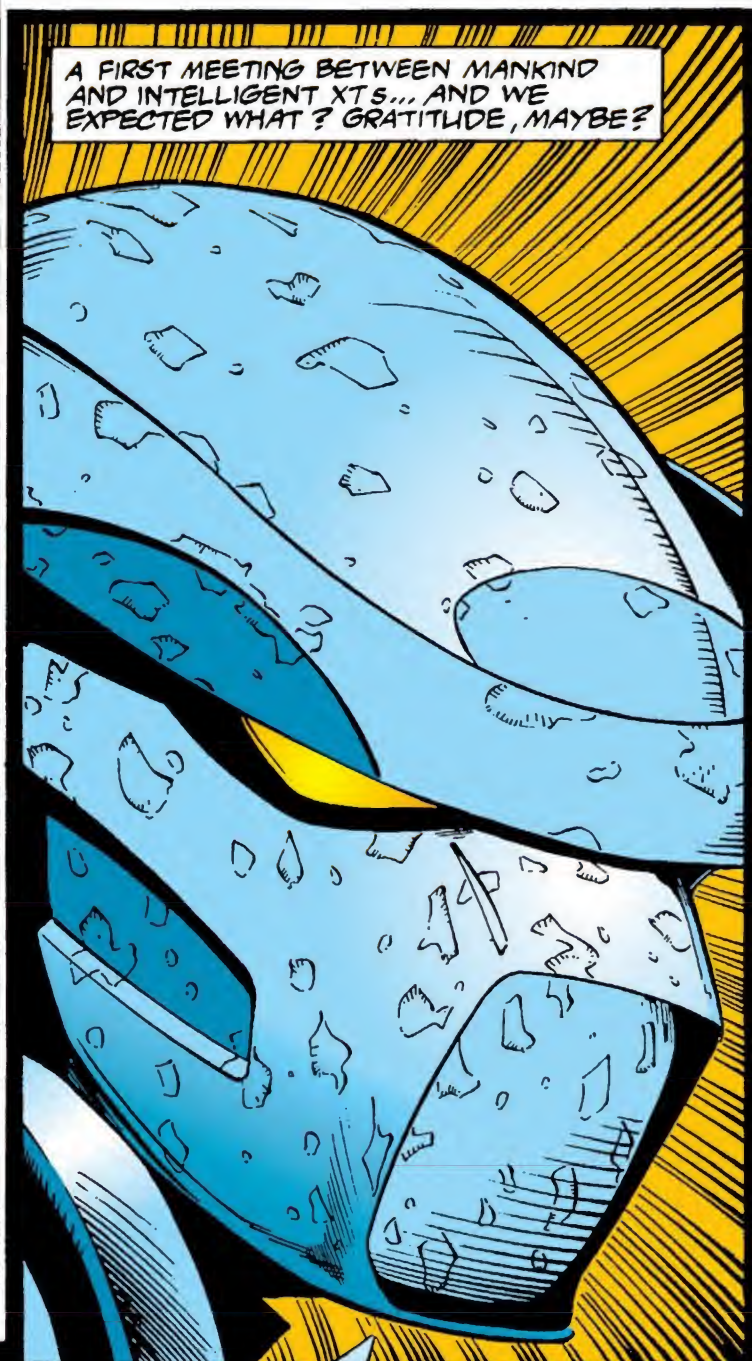








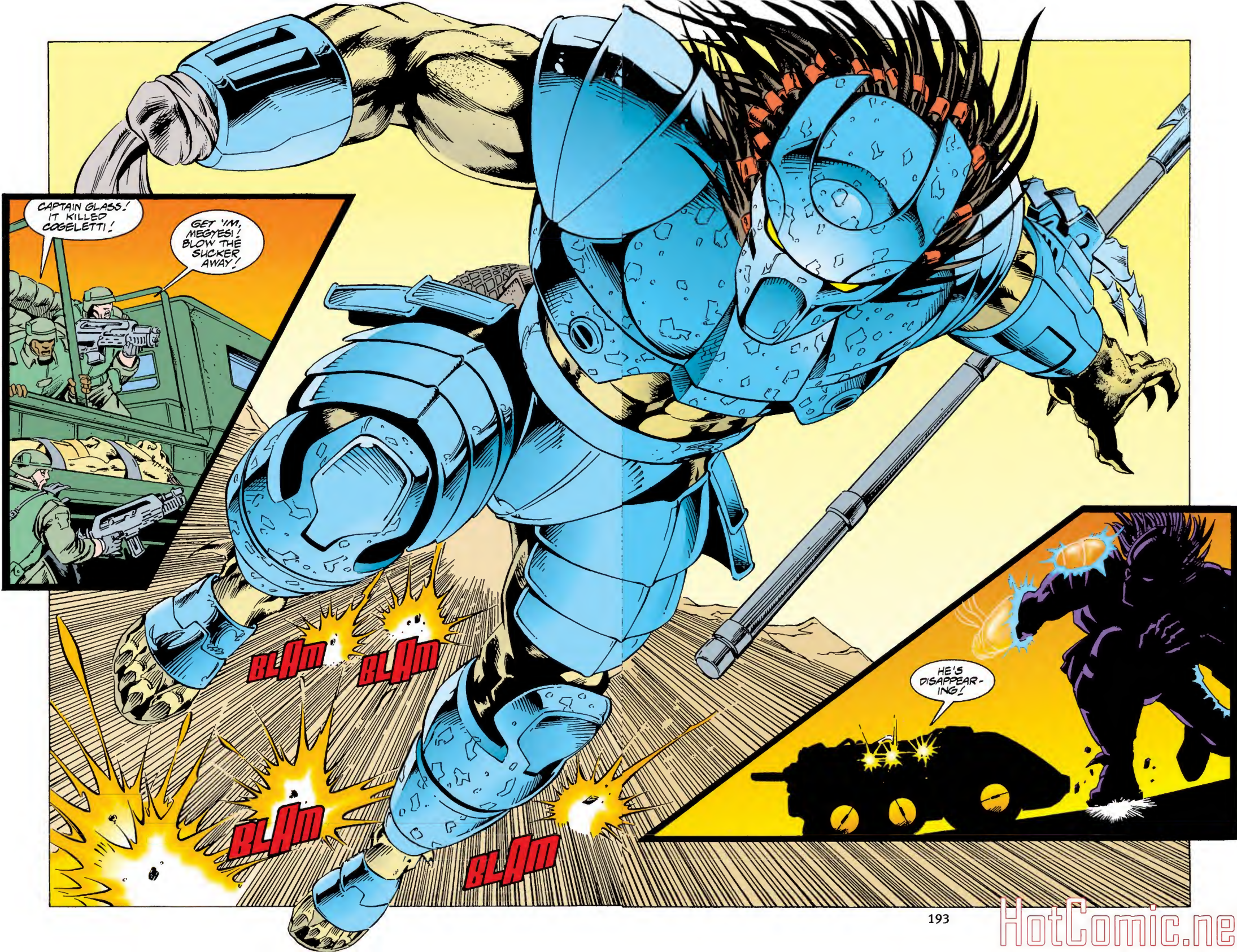
WE RECEIVED A DISTRESS
SIGNAL... WE CAME TO HELP...

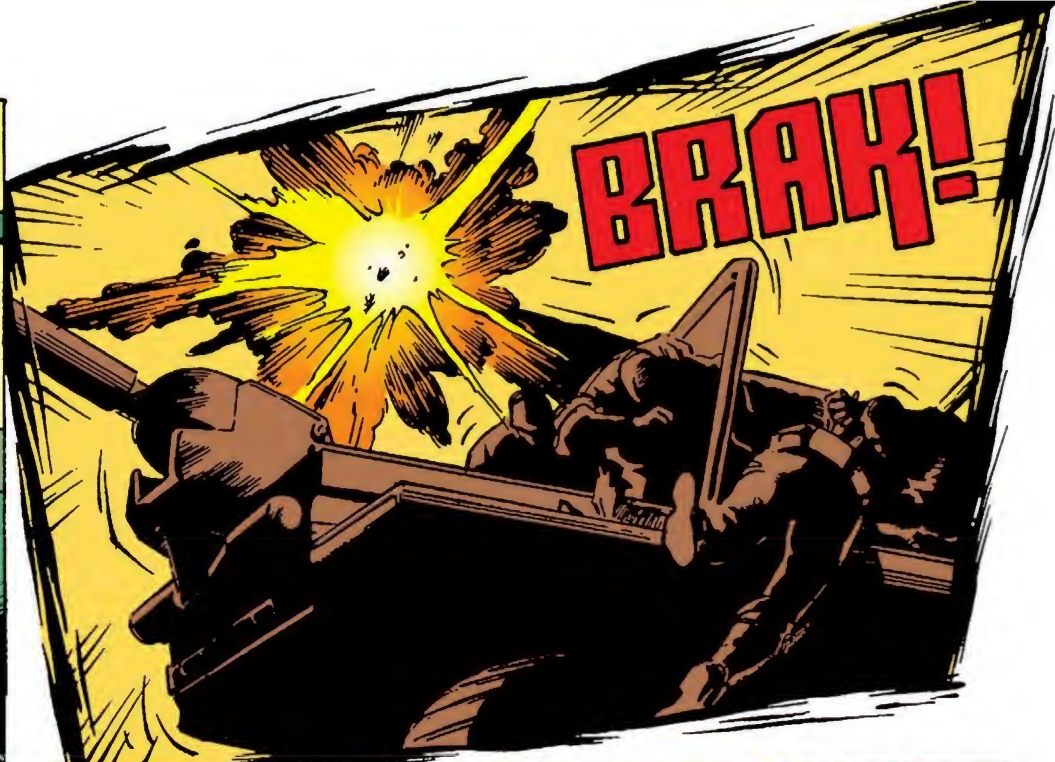


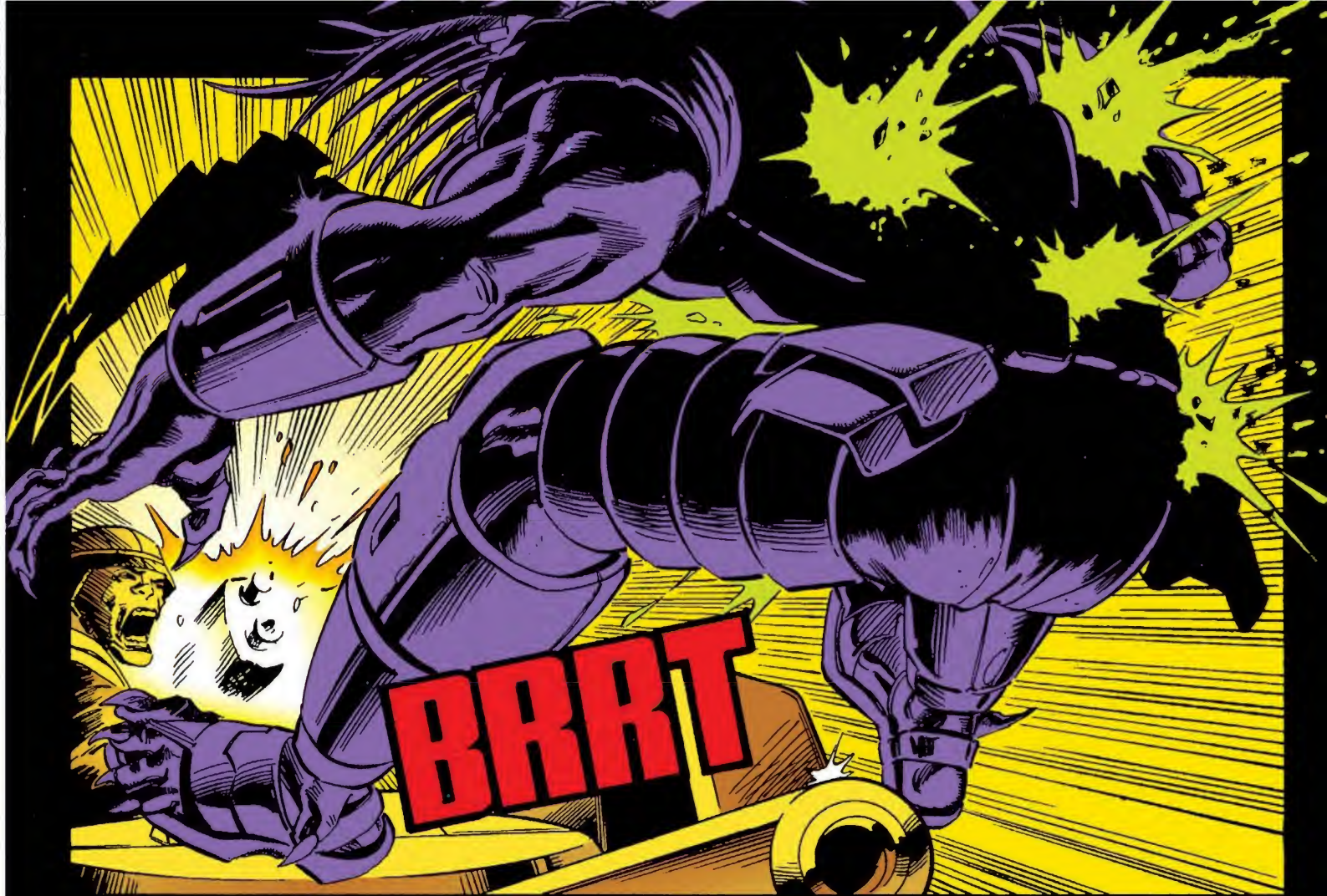
A FIRST MEETING BETWEEN MANKIND
AND INTELLIGENT XTS... AND WE
EXPECTED WHAT? GRATITUDE, MAYBE?

COGELETTI!

BUT THEY'RE AS MUCH
MONSTERS AS THE ALIEN
BUGS THEY BROUGHT
WITH THEM.



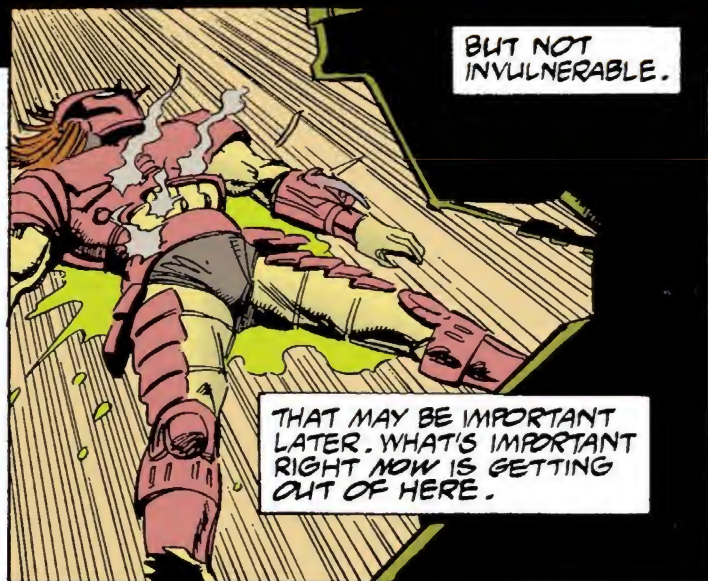




BRRRT



INVISIBLE...

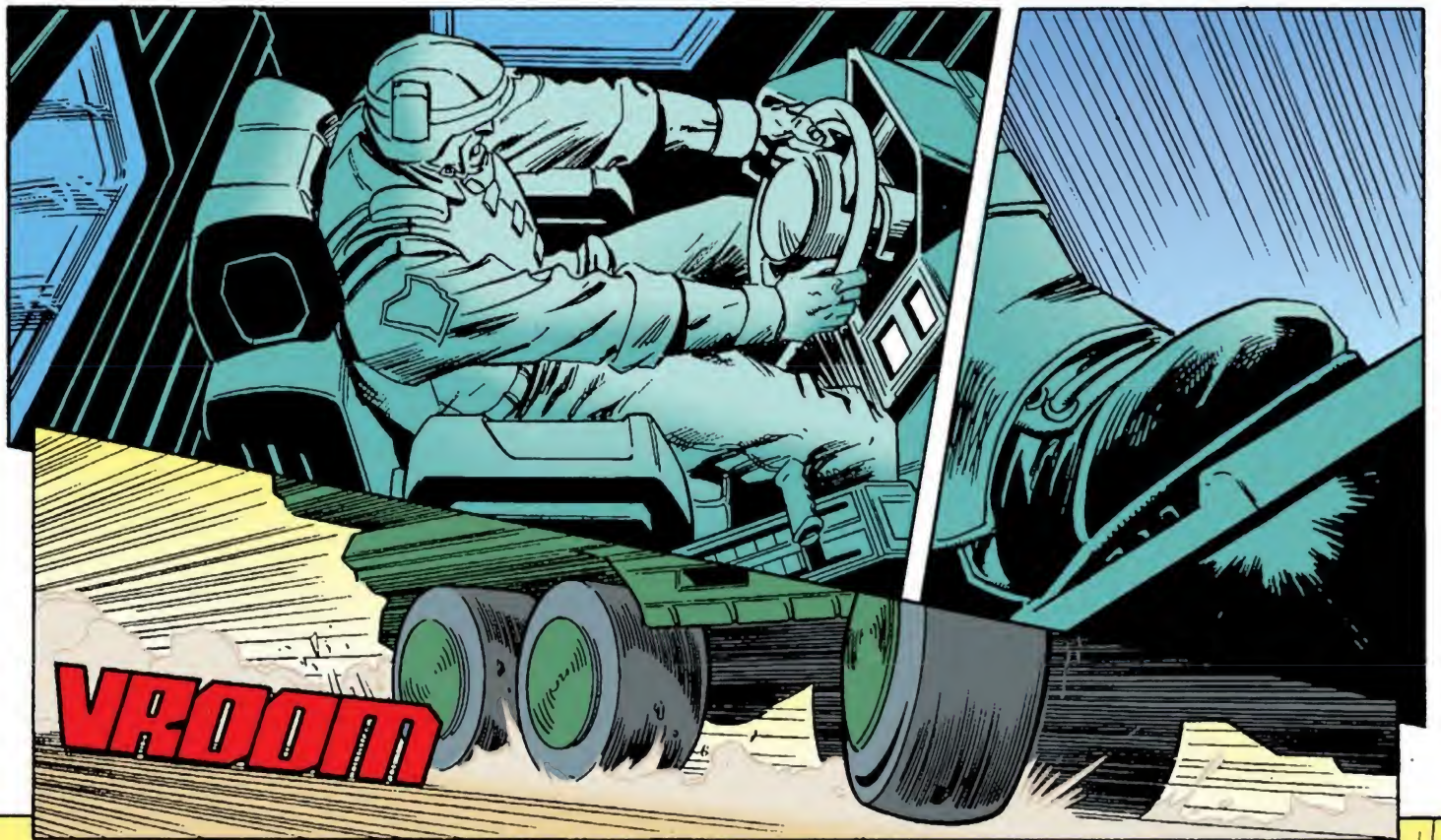


BUT NOT INVULNERABLE.

THAT MAY BE IMPORTANT LATER. WHAT'S IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW IS GETTING OUT OF HERE.



GO!
GO!
GO!





WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT, SIR?

HELL IF I KNOW, SERGEANT, BUT WE'RE NOT WAITING AROUND FOR AN EXPLANATION.

WE'LL HEAD BACK TO THE NOGUCHI WOMAN'S CABIN--

"--USE HER ANTENNA ARRAY TO BOOST A SIGNAL PAST CYGNI MINOR'S INTERFERENCE. WE'RE CALLING MURPHY IN FOR A DUST-OFF."



HOW'S OUR...UH, SURVIVOR, SALI?

HOW CAN I KNOW, GLASS? HIS BODY TEMPERATURE'S MUCH HIGHER THAN OURS, HIS BREATHING'S RAGGED, AND HE STINKS. BUT FOR ALL I KNOW THAT MIGHT BE NORMAL FOR HIM.

GIVEN THE TROUBLE WE'VE ALREADY HAD, I VOTE WE FORGET ABOUT HIM AND JUST GET OURSELVES OFF THIS DUSTBALL.



COME ON, SALI. YOU KNOW WE CAN'T DO THAT--

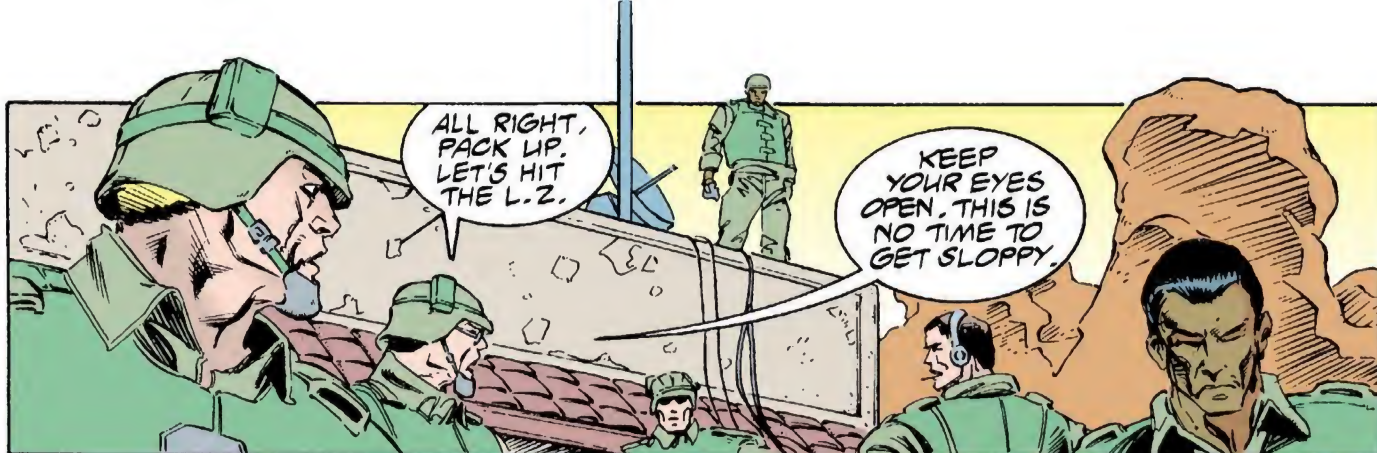
--THE BRASS AT RED WOULD HAVE OUR BUTTS. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY. SEE IF WE CAN'T KEEP HIM ALIVE AT LEAST UNTIL WE CAN GET HIM INTO HYPERSLEEP...



CAPTAIN! WE'VE GOT AN UPLINK!

GOOD. TELL MURPHY I WANT HER HERE YESTERDAY.

DONE, SIR. SHE SAYS ETA TWENTY MINUTES. SHE'S COOKING ON ALL BURNERS.



ALL RIGHT,
PACK UP.
LET'S HIT
THE L.Z.

KEEP
YOUR EYES
OPEN. THIS IS
NO TIME TO
GET SLOPPY.



HEY, REED--
GIVE ME A
HAND STOWING
THIS CABLE.

LEAVE
IT,
MEGYESI--



-- YOU
HEARD THE
CAPTAIN. WE'RE
OUTTA HERE--
BACK TO AIR
CONDITIONING!



SIR, YOU THINK
MURPHY WILL GET
HERE BEFORE
THIS GUY'S
BUDDIES DO?

WHAT'RE YOU
TALKING ABOUT,
FRANCE? WHY
WOULD THEY
FOLLOW
US?

BESIDES, WE
PUT TEN KLIKES
BETWEEN US
AND THAT
SHIP.

THE KID'S GOT A
POINT, SIR. WE
STUCK OUR NOSES
IN THE MIDDLE OF
SOMETHING WE
DON'T UNDERSTAND,
THAT'S FOR SURE.

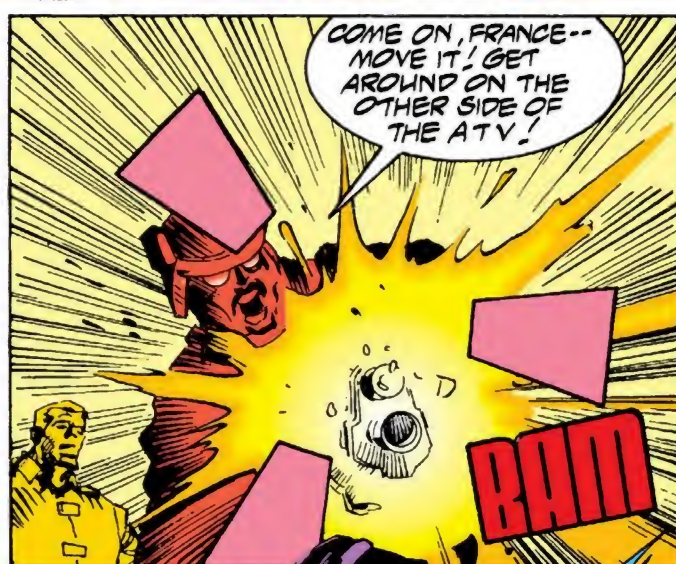
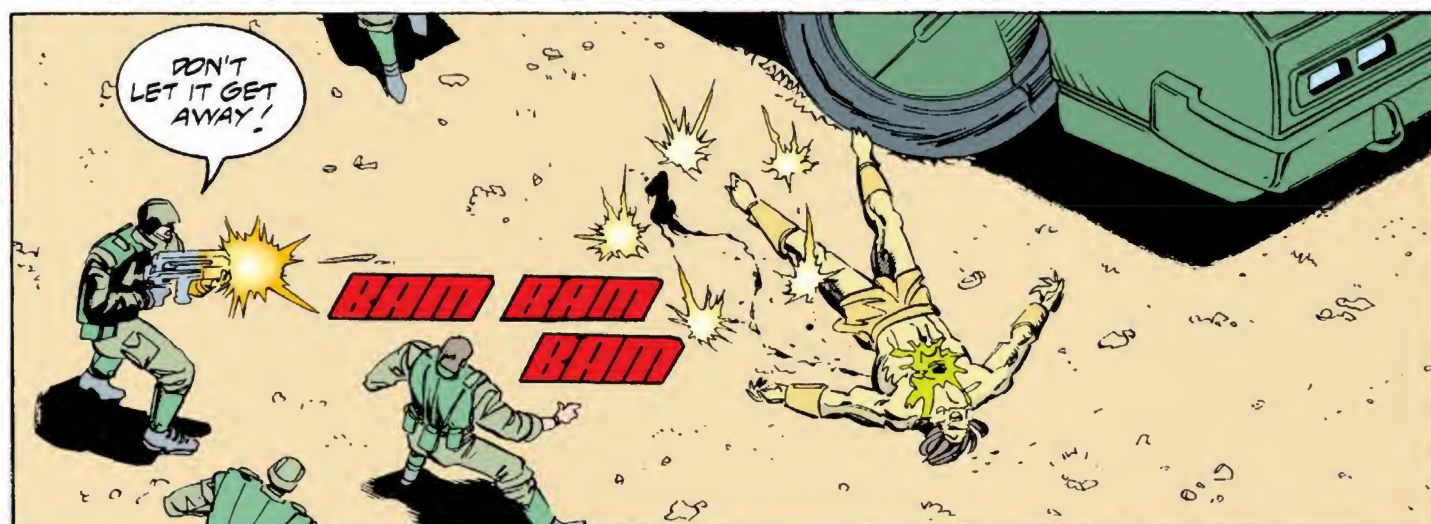
TRYING TO GUESS
WHAT THE XTS WILL
OR WON'T DO IS
A SUCKER'S BET.

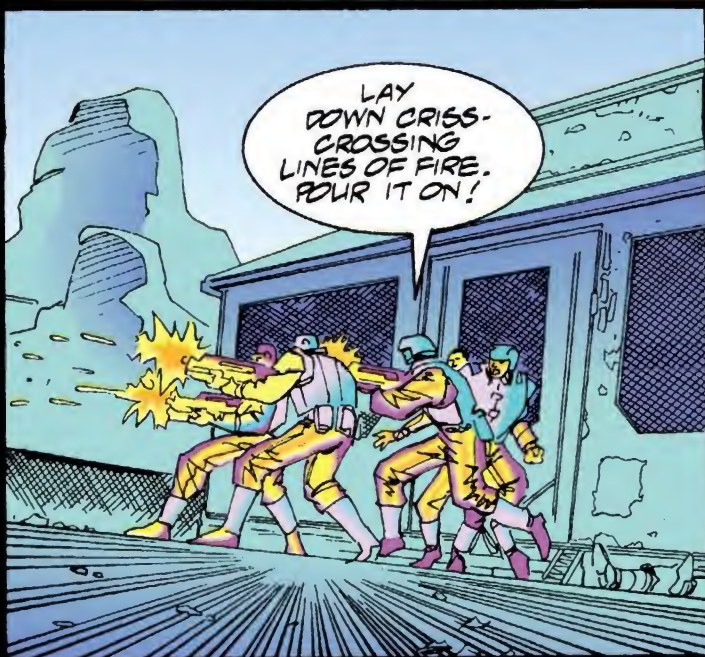
AND YOU SAW HOW
FAST THEY WERE. NO
TELLING HOW QUICKLY
THEY CAN COVER
OPEN GROUND.

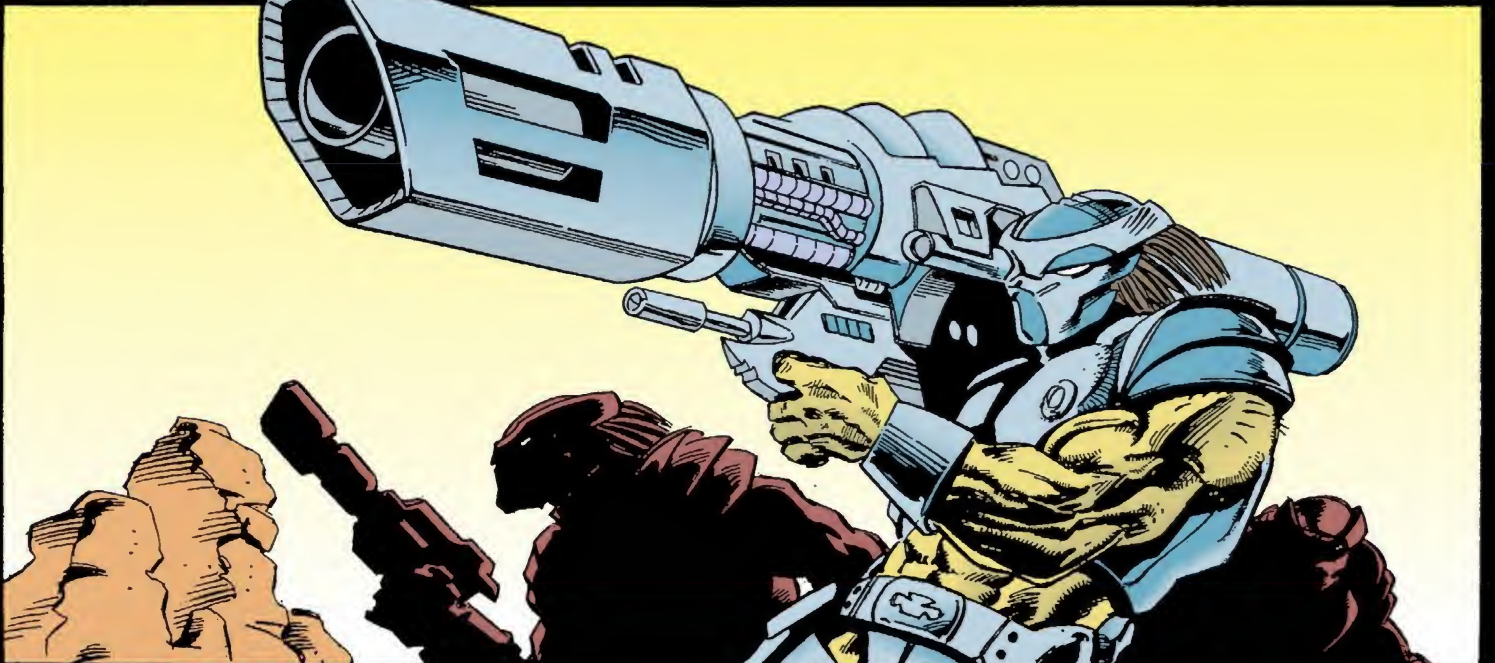
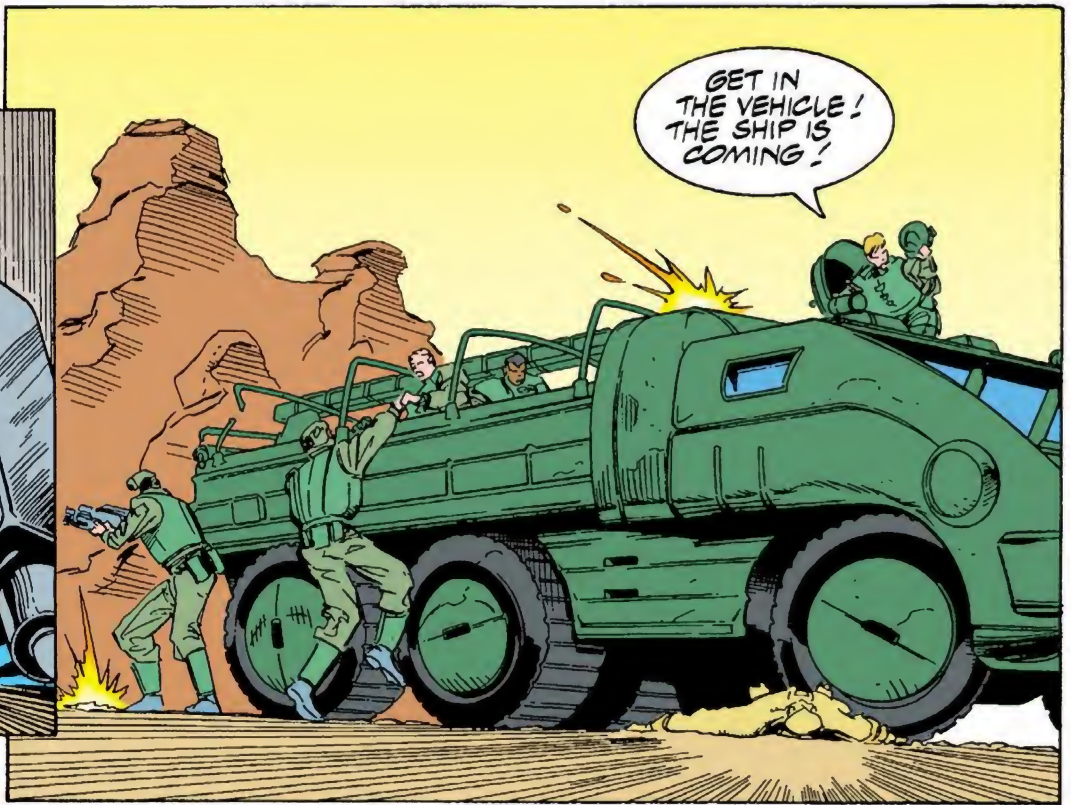
AND DON'T
FORGET-- WE'D
NEVER
SEE THEM
COMING.

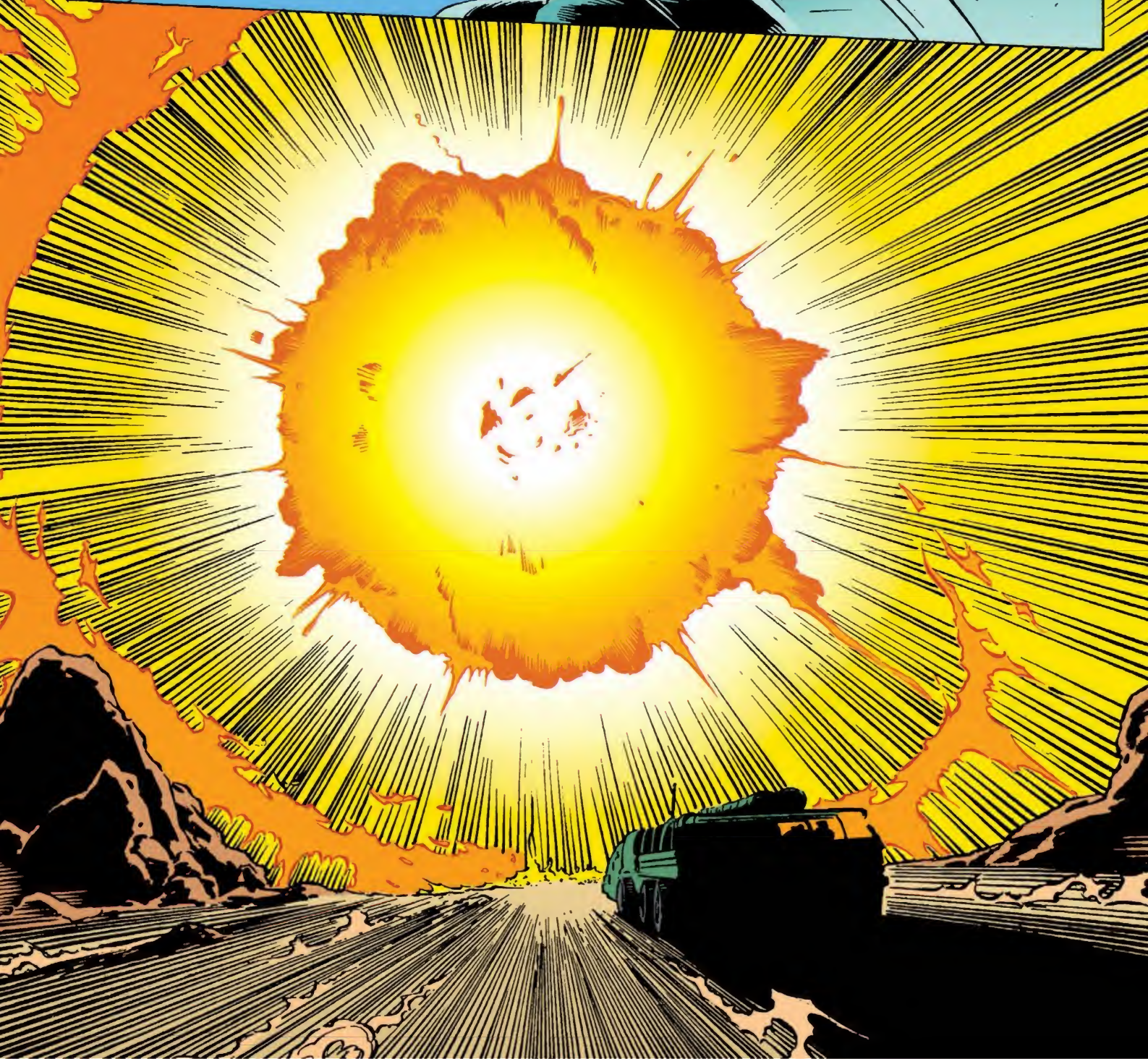
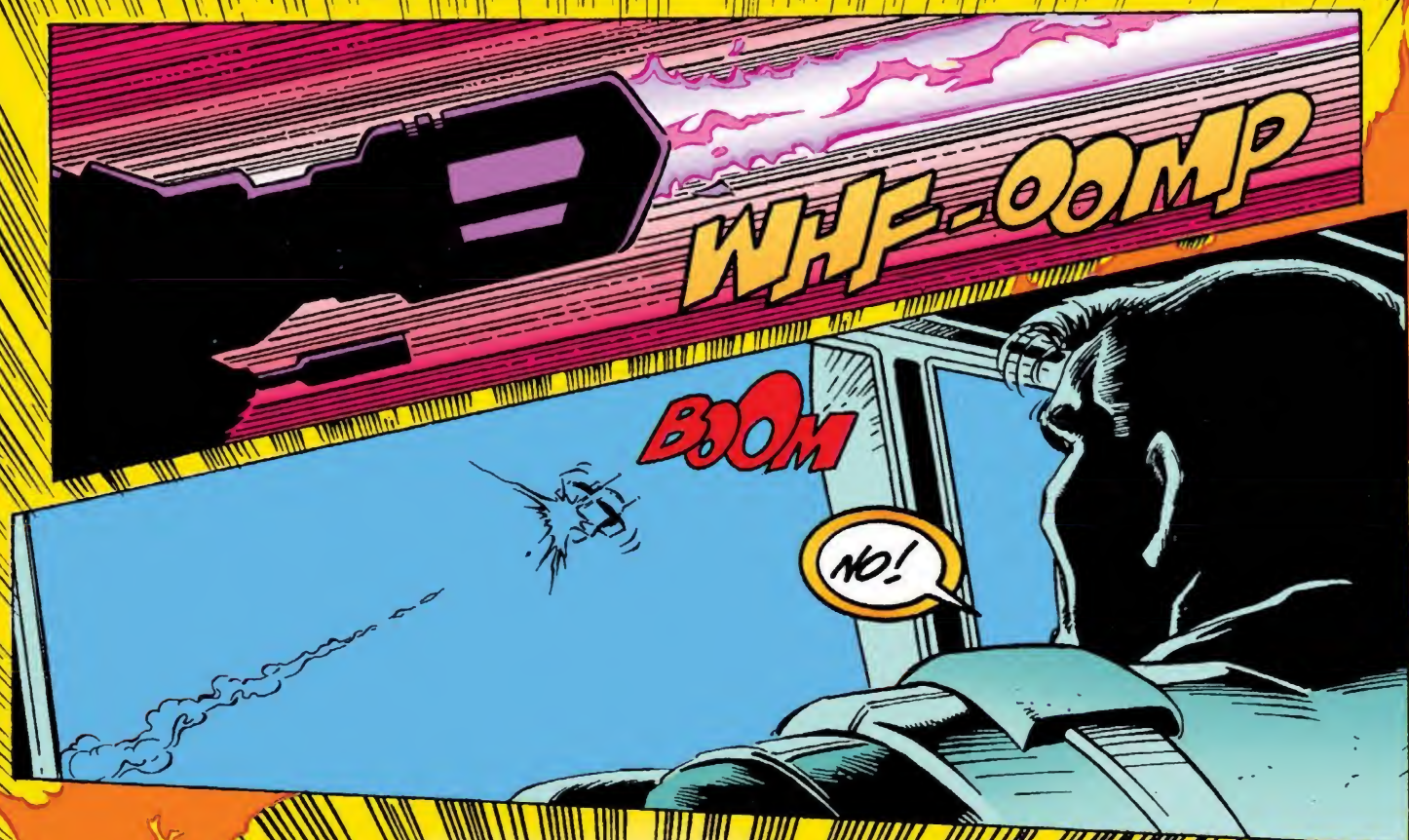


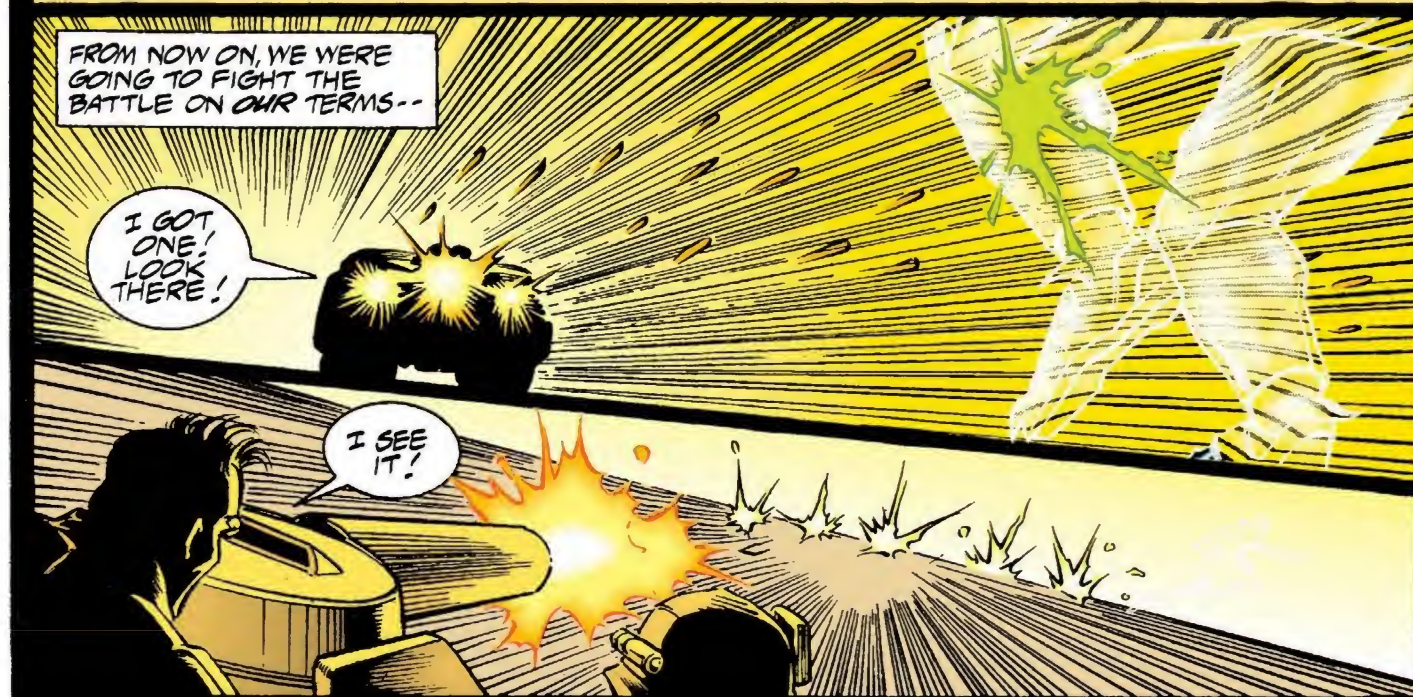
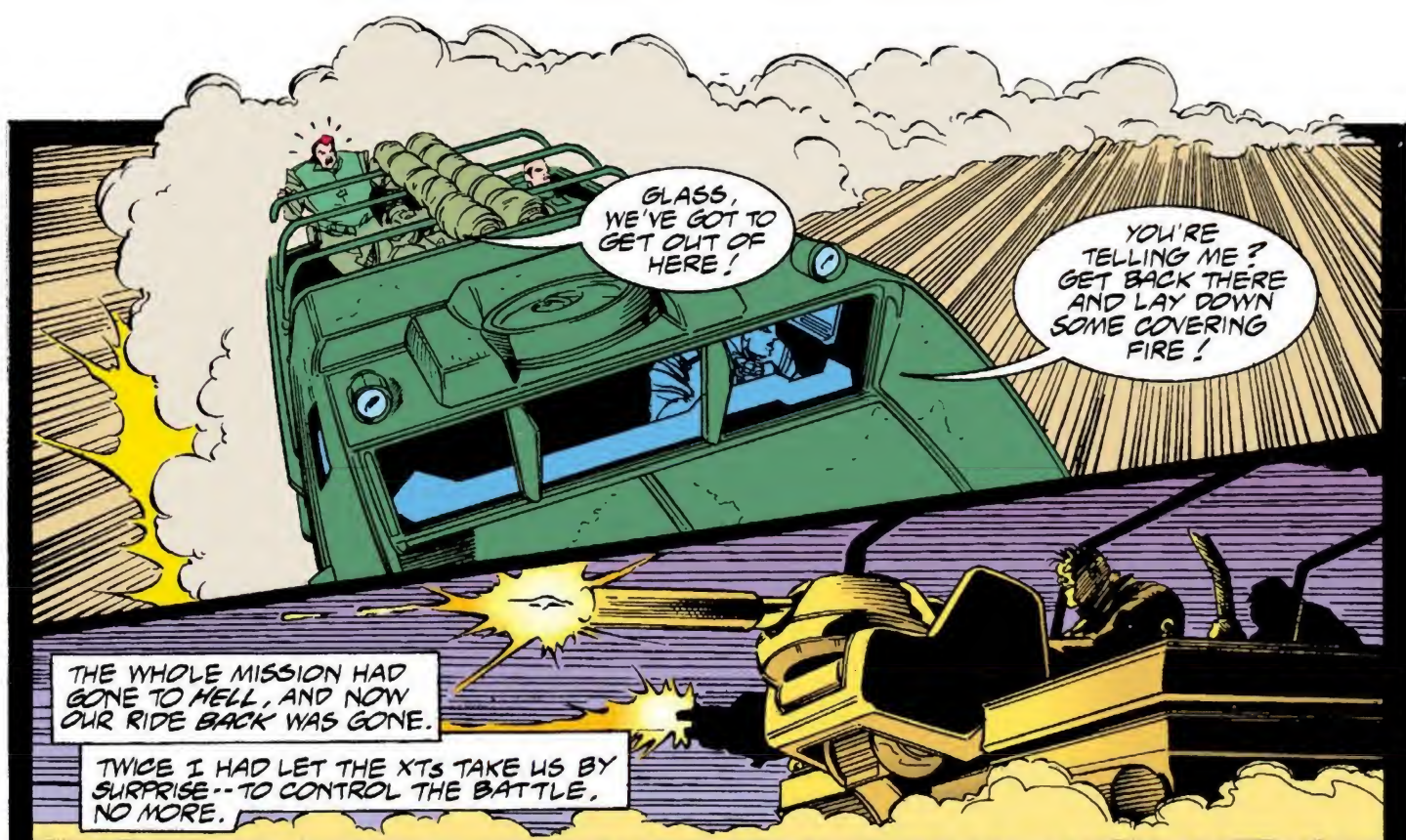


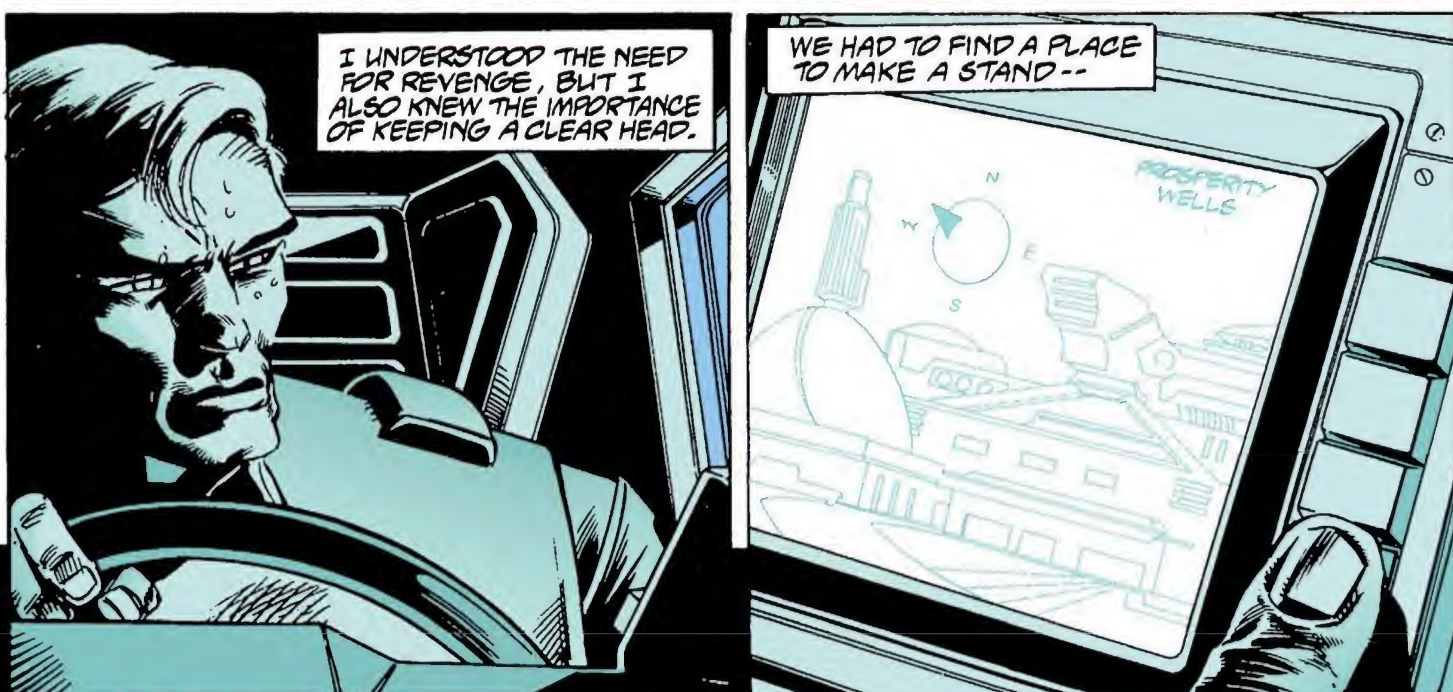














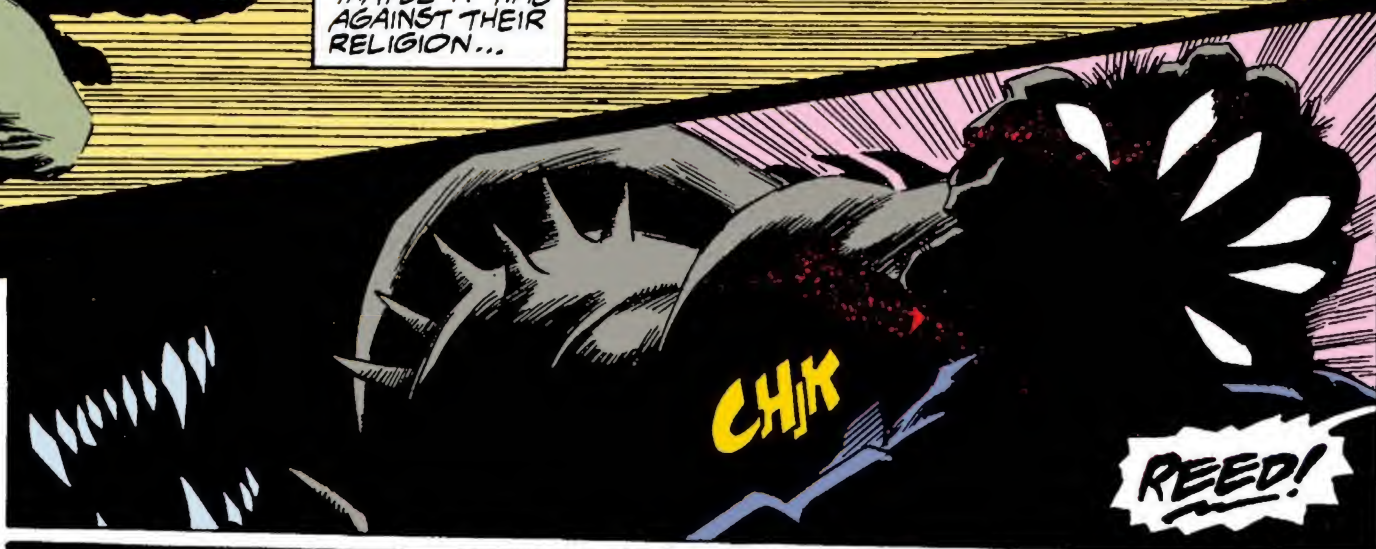




THE CREATURE WAS A NIGHTMARE HYBRID OF A BUG AND THE XTS FROM THE CRASH SITE.

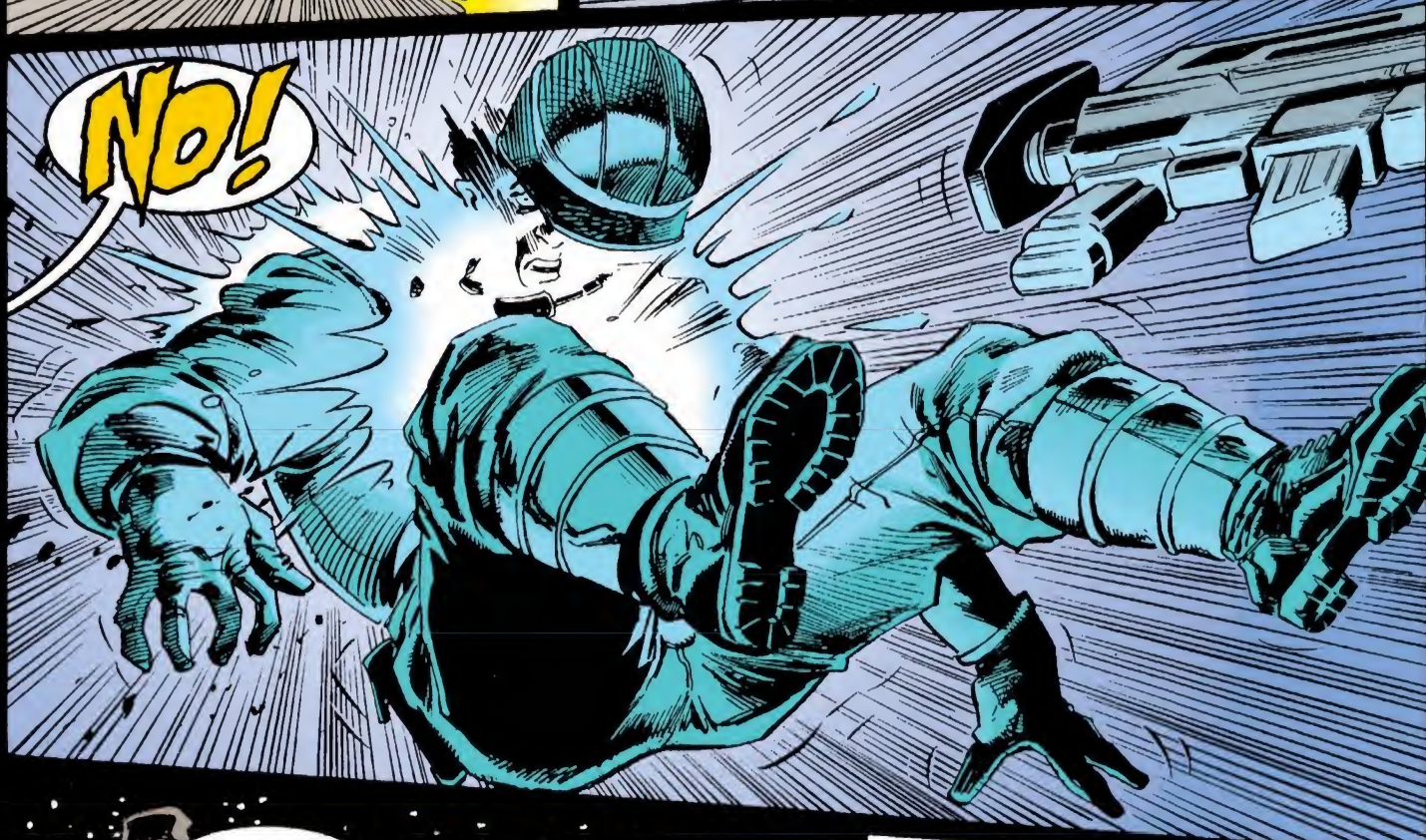
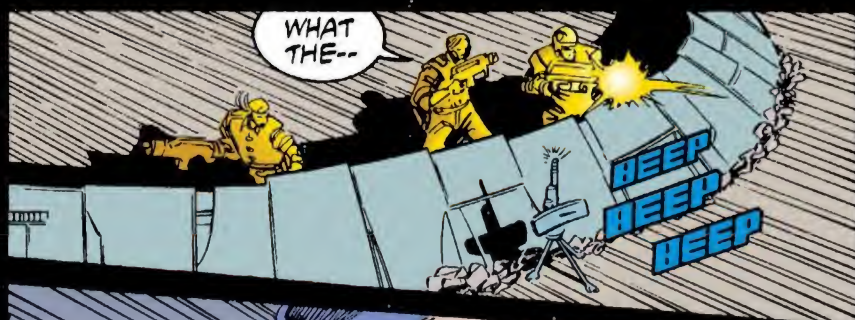
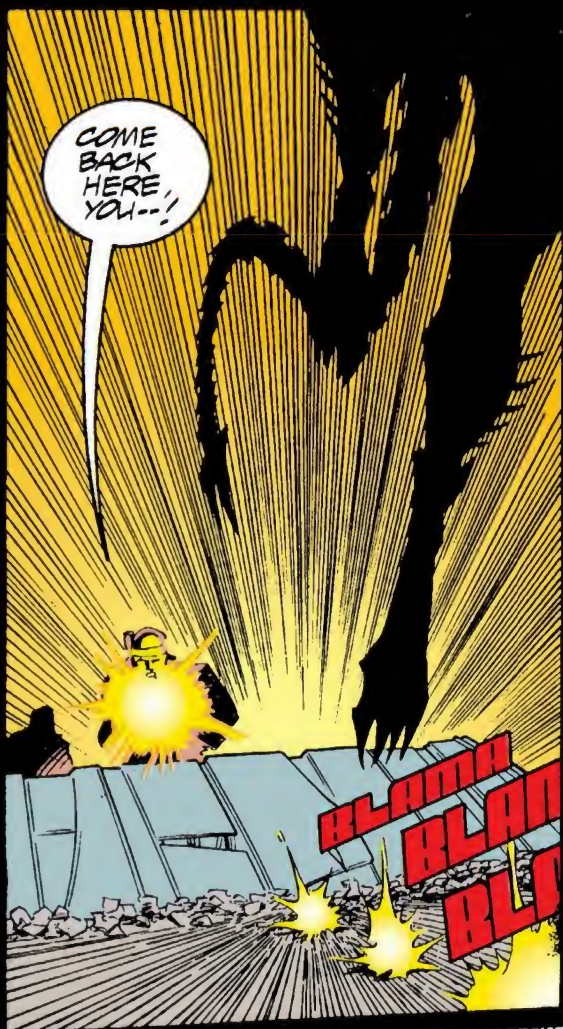
MAYBE THAT WAS WHY THE XTS WERE AFTER US. WE ALLOWED THIS MONSTER TO BE BORN. WE'D LET IT OUT INTO THE WORLD.

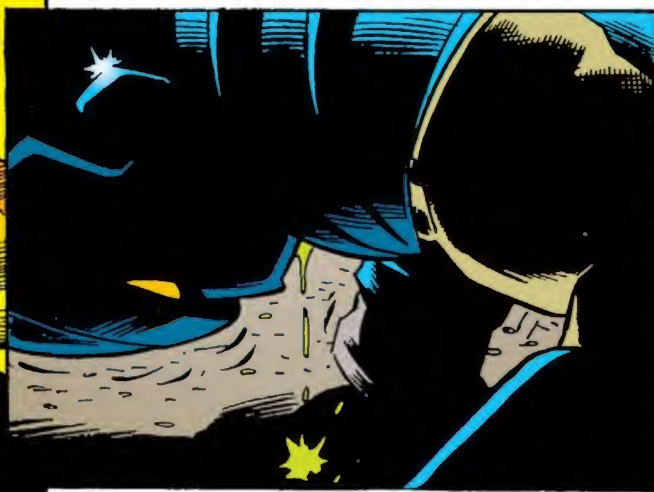
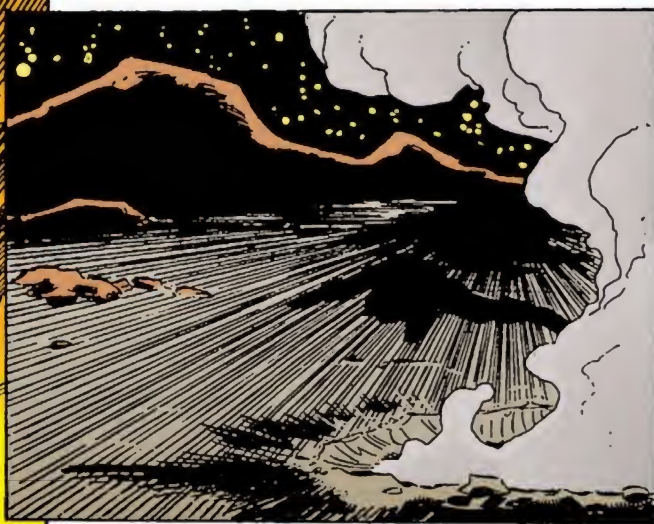
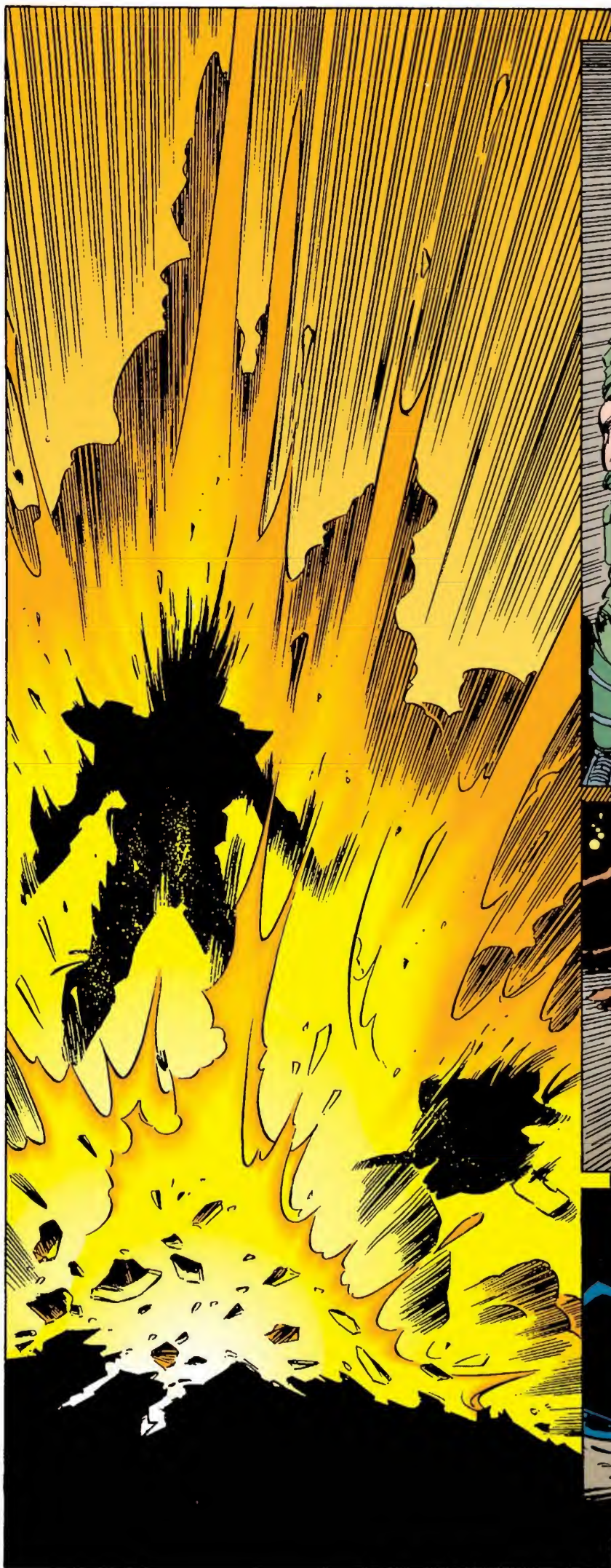
MAYBE IT WAS AGAINST THEIR RELIGION...



I KNEW WE COULDN'T ALLOW IT TO LIVE.

IT KILLED REED! GET IT!









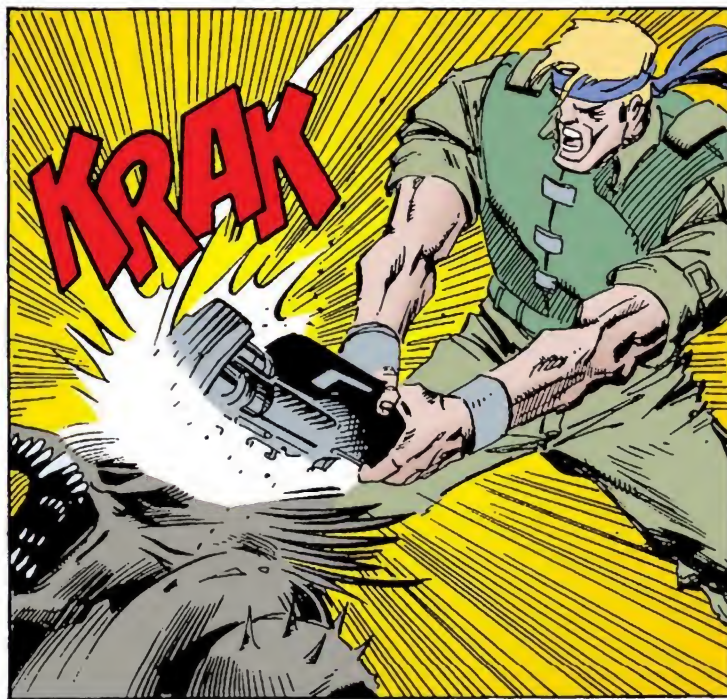
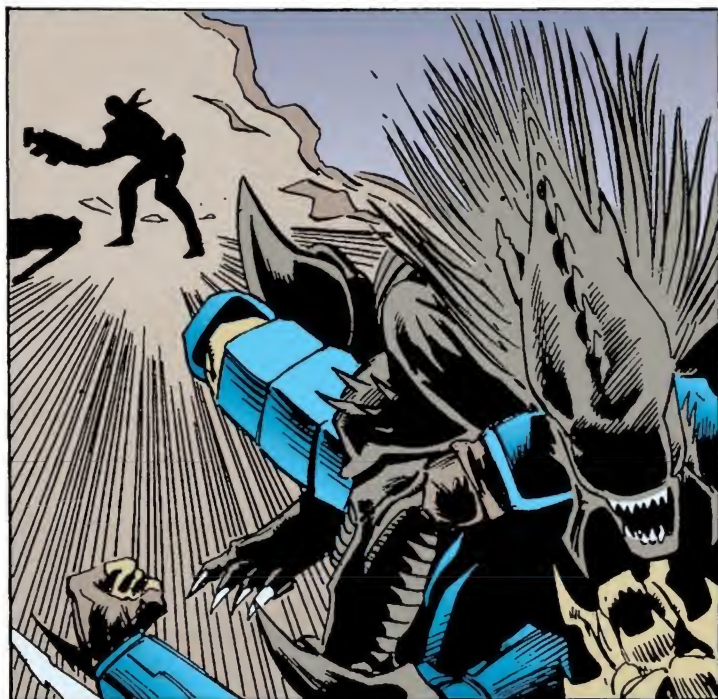
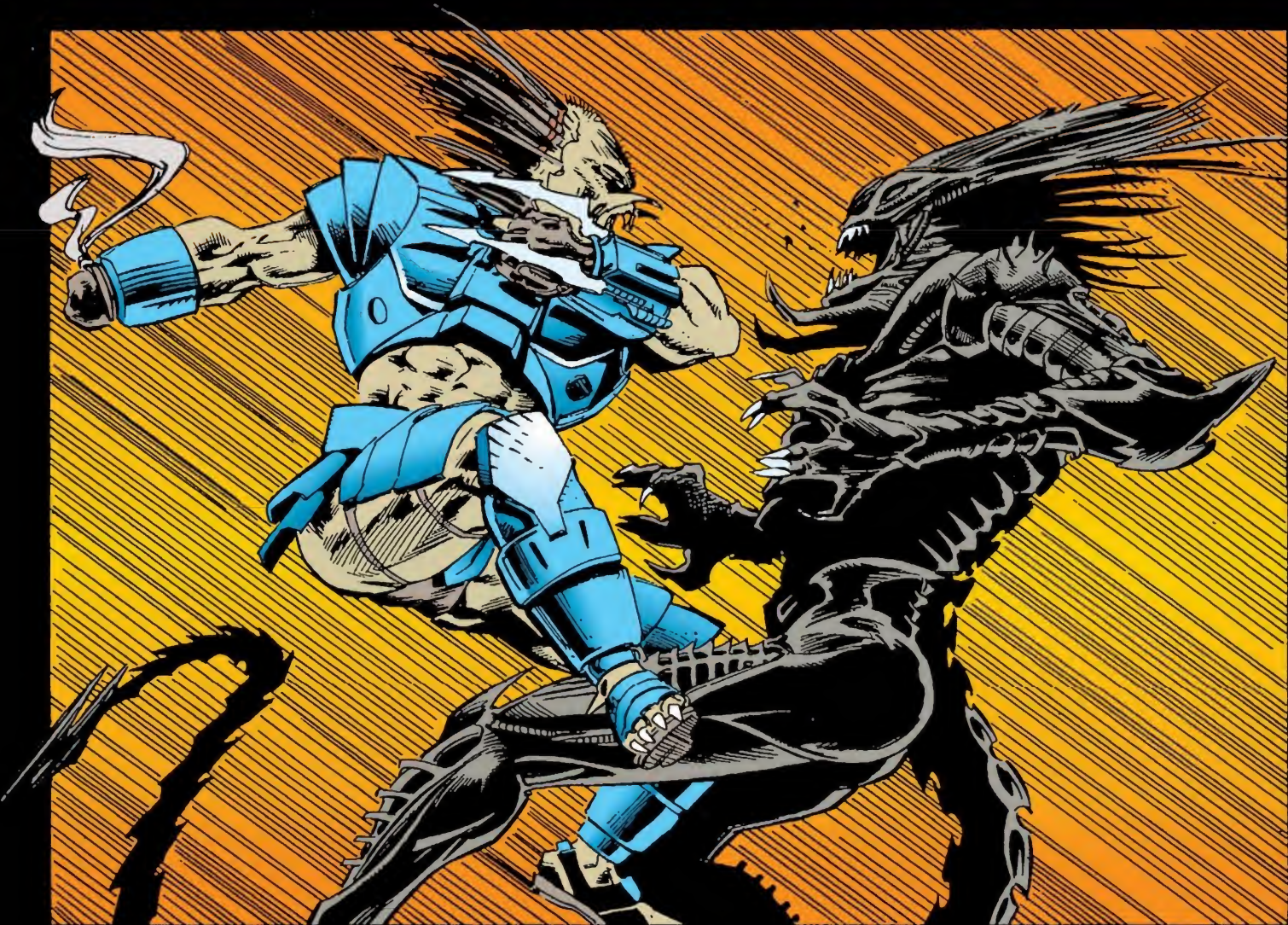
LIKE I SAID,
IT COMES DOWN
TO CHOICES.



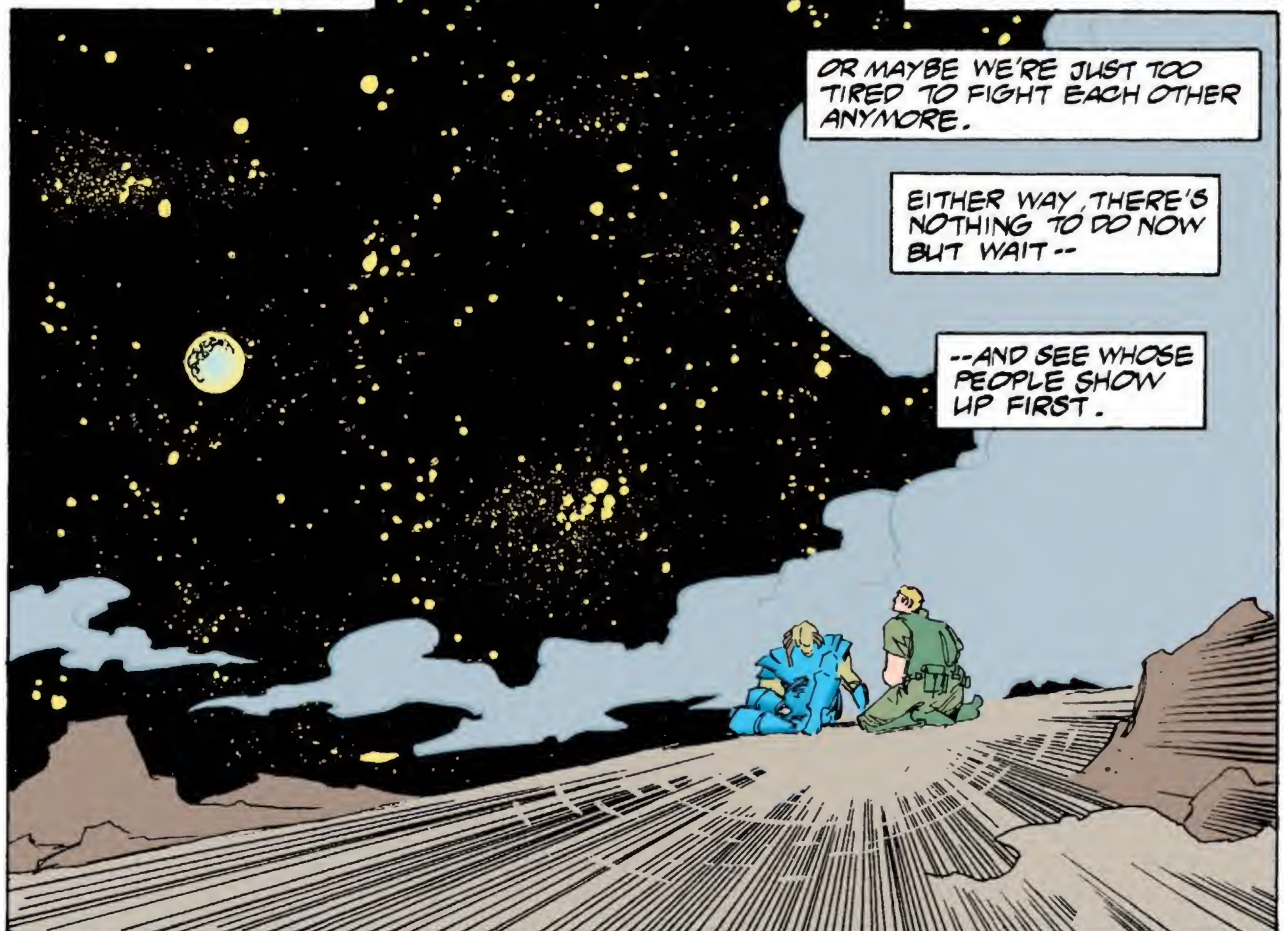
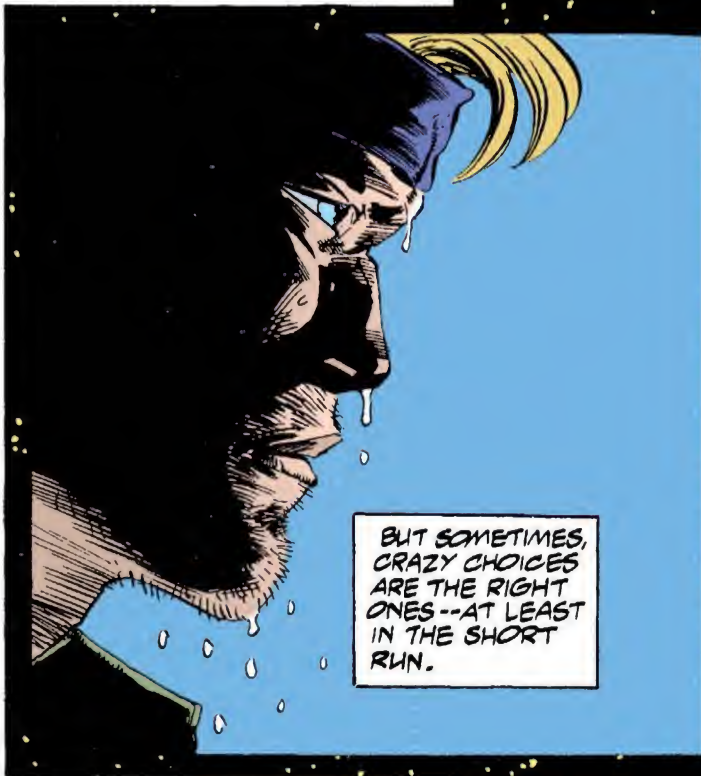
GOOD OR
BAD-- LIFE
OR DEATH--



--SANE OR
CRAZY...







WAR



HotComic.net

PART 1

script

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ANOTHER WORLD
DOMINATED BY
THE BUGS.



ACCORDING TO
HUNTER FOLKLORE,
THE BUGS EVOLVED
SIMULTANEOUSLY
ON A MULTITUDE
OF WORLDS.

THIS IS
NONSENSE,
OF COURSE.

WORSE, IT
MASKS THE
HORROR
BEHIND THE
TRUTH--

--WHICH IS THAT THE
BUGS ARE ABLE TO
ADAPT TO, AND
THRIVE IN, ANY
ENVIRONMENT--

--AND THAT IT'S THE
HUNTERS WHO ARE
PRIMARY RESPONSIBLE
FOR SPREADING THE
BUGS THROUGHOUT
THE GALAXY.

THIS WORLD ABOUNDS WITH POTENTIAL. WATER IS PLENTIFUL, THE ATMOSPHERE IS CAPABLE OF SUPPORTING LIFE, AND THE TEMPERATURE IS STABLE, THOUGH COLD BY HUNTER STANDARDS.

THE BUGS WOULDN'T CARE IF IT WAS HOT AND DUSTY WITH NOTHING BUT OHLORINE TO BREATHE.

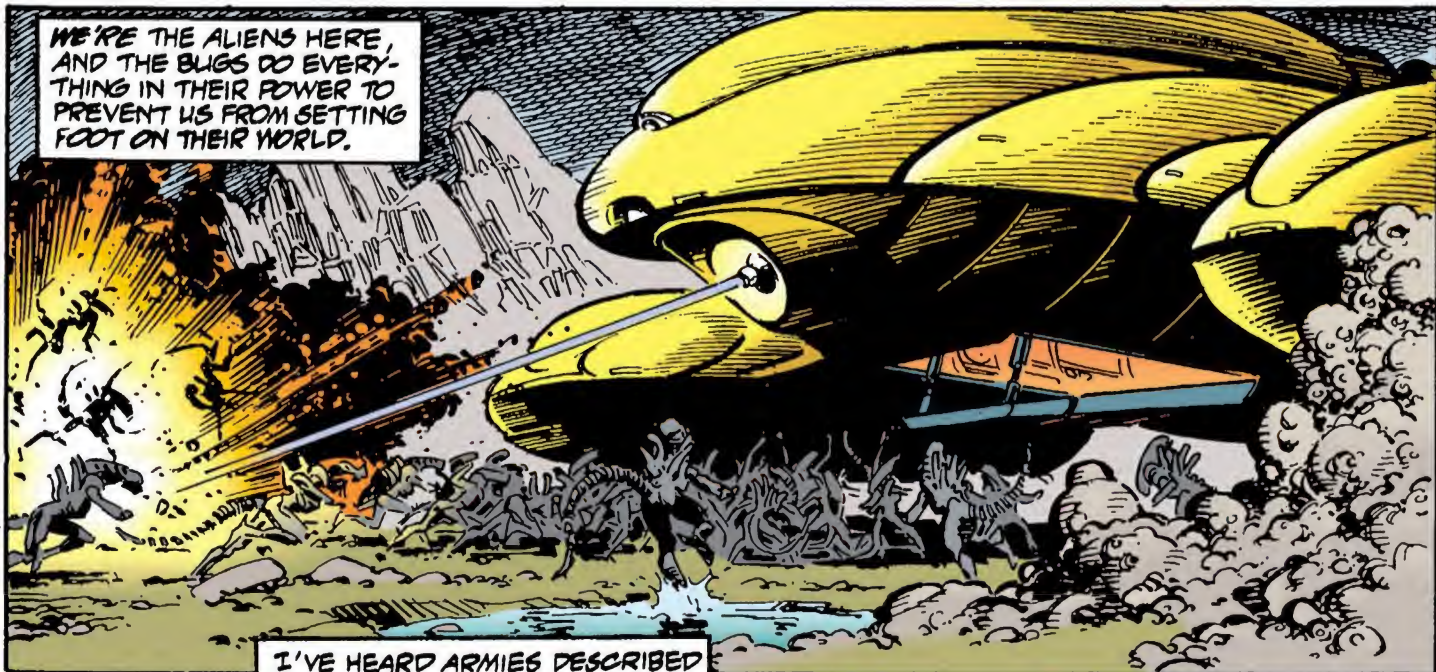
INSIDE THE SHIP, THE HEAT RISES TO MEET THE TENSION LEVEL AS THE HUNTERS ADJUST THE THERMOSTATS ON THEIR BODY MESH.

TOPKNOT GIVES THE "READY" SIGNAL.

WHETHER THE BUGS WERE PUT HERE INTENTIONALLY, OR IF THEIR PRESENCE IS THE RESULT OF THE KIND OF ACCIDENT THAT OCCURRED ON RYUSHI, I DON'T KNOW.

IT DOESN'T MATTER. THIS WORLD BELONGS TO THEM NOW.

WE'RE THE ALIENS HERE,
AND THE BUGS DO EVERY-
THING IN THEIR POWER TO
PREVENT US FROM SETTING
FOOT ON THEIR WORLD.




I'VE HEARD ARMIES DESCRIBED
AS ATTACKING IN "WAVES"--
SOLDIERS CHARGING AN
OBJECTIVE LIKE BREAKERS
STRIKING THE SHORELINE.

THIS IS NOTHING LIKE THAT.

THERE ARE NO LULLS
BETWEEN "WAVES" OF
ATTACKERS. THEIR ATTACK
IS A SINGLE WAVE--A
TSUNAMI OF NEEDLE
TEETH, RAZOR CLAWS,
AND SICKLE TAILS.





FOR THIS EXPEDITION, THE RITUAL LAWS OF MATCHING THE QUARRY WEAPON FOR WEAPON ARE SUSPENDED. PLASMA-CASTERS AND LASERS REPLACE THE NAGINATAS AND SCATTER GUNS PRESCRIBED FOR HUNTING BUGS.

THIS IS NO HUNTING TRIP-- THIS IS WAR!

THERE ARE NO RULES IN WAR-- ONLY OBJECTIVES.



OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO
ENTER THE BUGS' HIVE...



...CLAIM OUR PRIZE...



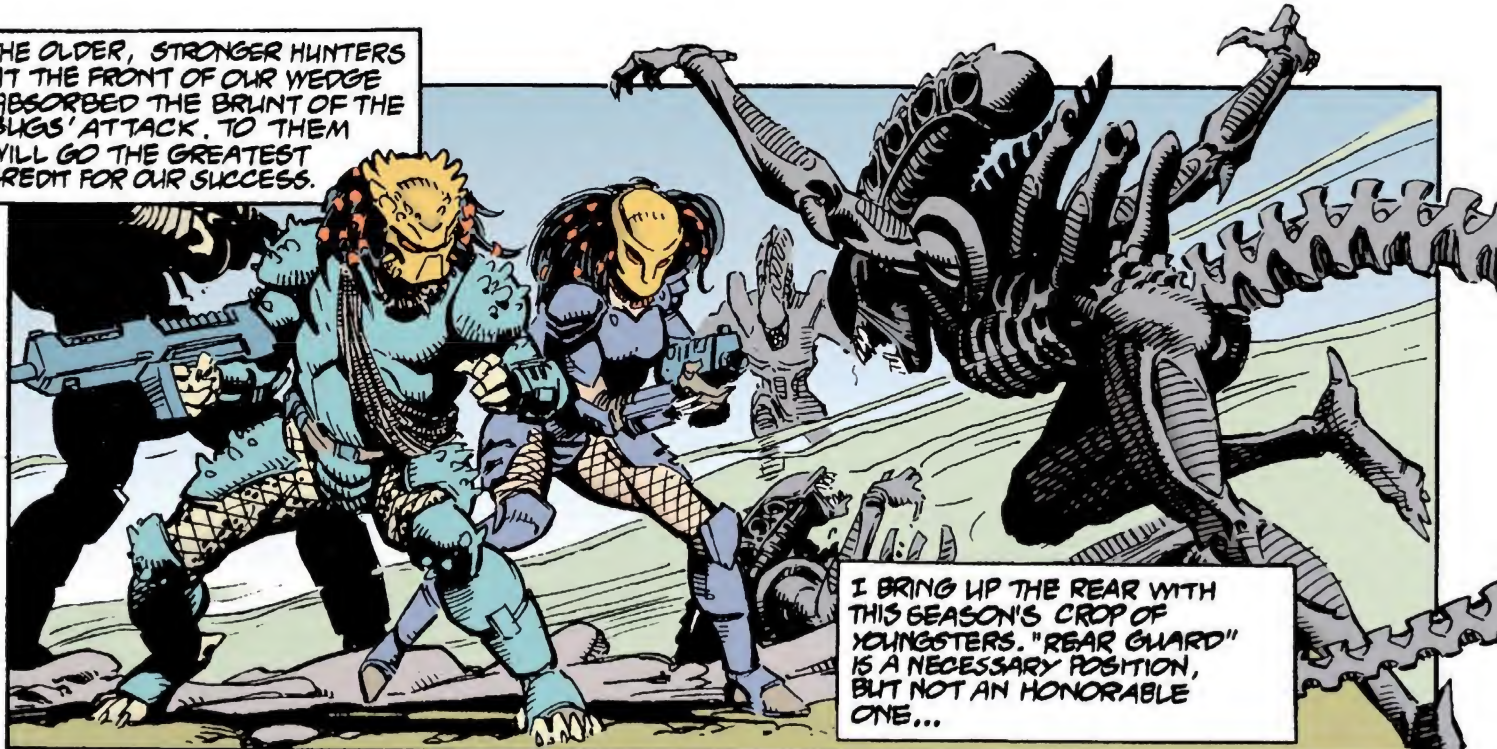
...AND RETURN
TO OUR SHIP.



THE BUGS' OBJECTIVE
IS TO STOP US.

THEY FAIL.

THE OLDER, STRONGER HUNTERS AT THE FRONT OF OUR WEDGE ABSORBED THE BRUNT OF THE BUGS' ATTACK. TO THEM WILL GO THE GREATEST CREDIT FOR OUR SUCCESS.



I BRING UP THE REAR WITH THIS SEASON'S CROP OF YOUNGSTERS. "REAR GUARD" IS A NECESSARY POSITION, BUT NOT AN HONORABLE ONE...

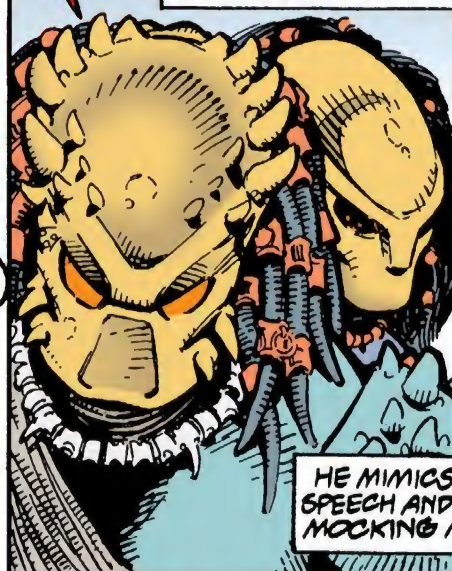
...AND COMPETITION FOR KILLS IS FIERCE.



HEY!
DAMMIT!

HAH-HAH!
HAH-HAH-HAH!

IT'S SHORTY, ONE OF THE NOVICES. HIS HEIGHT MAKES HIM A TARGET FOR THE OTHERS IN THE CASTE, AND HE'S DECIDED THE "TOKEN" HUMAN SHOULD BE THE WHIPPING BOY FOR HIS ANGER.



HE MIMICS HUMAN SPEECH AND LAUGHTER, MOCKING ME.

HAH-HAH!
HAH-HAH!



LET HIM LAUGH. HE'LL DISCOVER SOON ENOUGH THAT...



...WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND.



SHORTY REALIZES, TOO LATE, THAT HE'S SCREWED UP.



I WAIT FOR IT TO SINK IN HOW BADLY HE'S SCREWED UP...

...THEN I DO THE WORST THING I CAN POSSIBLY DO TO HIM...



I SAVE HIS LIFE.



NOT ONLY HAS HE BEEN DENIED AN "HONORABLE" DEATH IN BATTLE, BUT I'VE SHAMED HIM IN FRONT OF HIS PEERS.



HA HA HA!
HA HA HA!

SHORTY WON'T LAUGH AT ME ANYMORE, BUT I'LL HAVE TO WATCH MY BACK.

I FIND THE BUGS' BIRTHING CHAMBER, AND I'M REMINDED OF ANOTHER TIME...

... AND OF THE RUPTURED BODIES OF COUNTLESS RHYNTH IN THE HOLD OF THE LECTOR.

THEN, THE PASSAGES ECHOED WITH THE SCREAMS OF ANGRY BUGS. NOW IT'S SO STILL I CAN HEAR THE CRUNCH OF DRIED BONES BENEATH MY FEET.

SO WHERE ARE THE HIVE'S DEFENDERS?

HAVE WE ALREADY ACHIEVED OUR GOAL?

YES.

THE BUGS AREN'T STRATEGISTS. THEY WOULDN'T WITHDRAW TO REGROUP...

OUR QUARRY IS SUBDUED, AND
HER BROOD IS HELD AT BAY
BY HER VULNERABILITY, BUT
NOW COMES THE MOST
DANGEROUS PART...



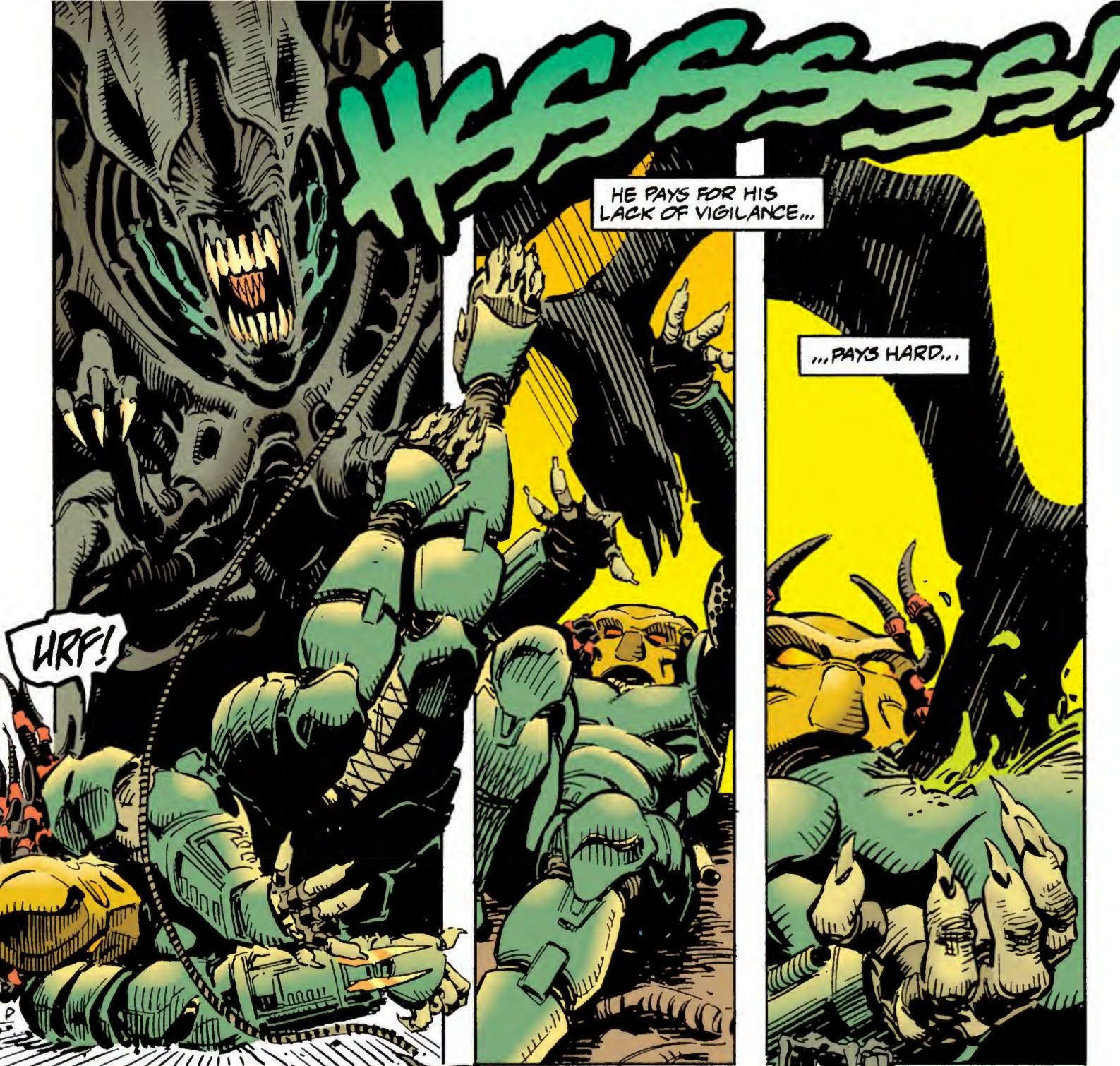
...THE CAPTURE TEAM
MUST MAINTAIN CONTROL
OF THE QUEEN AS
TOPKNOT PREPARES
HER FOR TRAVEL.



AAAHRK!

THREE-SPOT IS
CAUGHT DAY-
DREAMING...

SCREEEEEE




HE PAYS FOR HIS
LACK OF VIGILANCE...

...PAYS HARD...

URF!



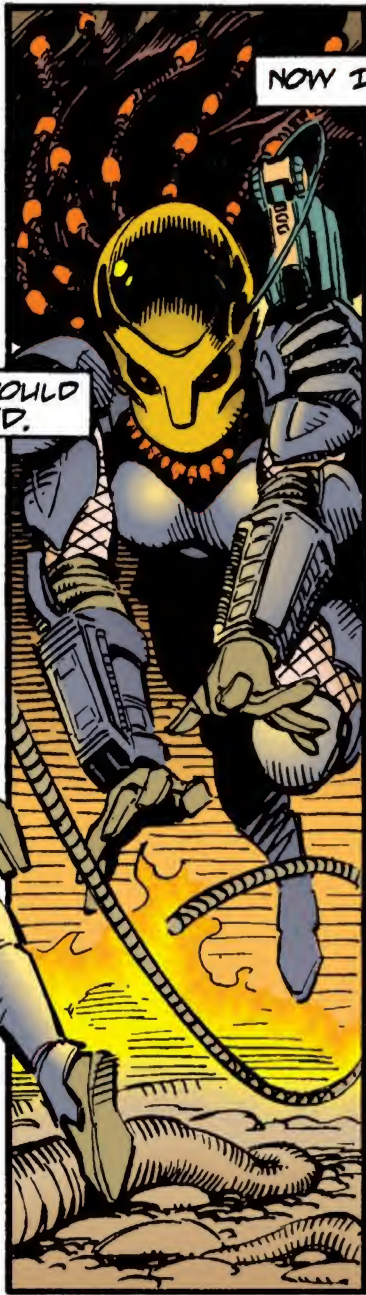
...AND PUTS THE
REST OF US IN PERIL.




OUR CAPTURE PARTY'S CONTINUED SAFETY RESTS ON OUR ABILITY TO CONTROL THE QUEEN. HER FREEDOM WILL BE THE SIGNAL FOR HER BROOD TO ATTACK.

BACK WHEN I WAS CORPORATE RAMROD ON RYUSHI, I WOULD HAVE EXAMINED THE SITUATION... WEIGHED MY OPTIONS.

PEOPLE WOULD HAVE DIED.




NOW I SIMPLY ACT.




MY ACTIONS SAVE THE MISSION FROM DISASTER...


...BUT MY REWARD IS A REBUKE.




BY ABANDONING MY POST, I HAVE DISOBEYED TOPKNOT'S ORDERS. THOUGH I HELPED AVERT DISASTER, I HAVE REVEALED MYSELF AS UNTRUSTWORTHY.



MY INSUBORDINATION MAY BE FORGIVEN, BUT IT WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN.



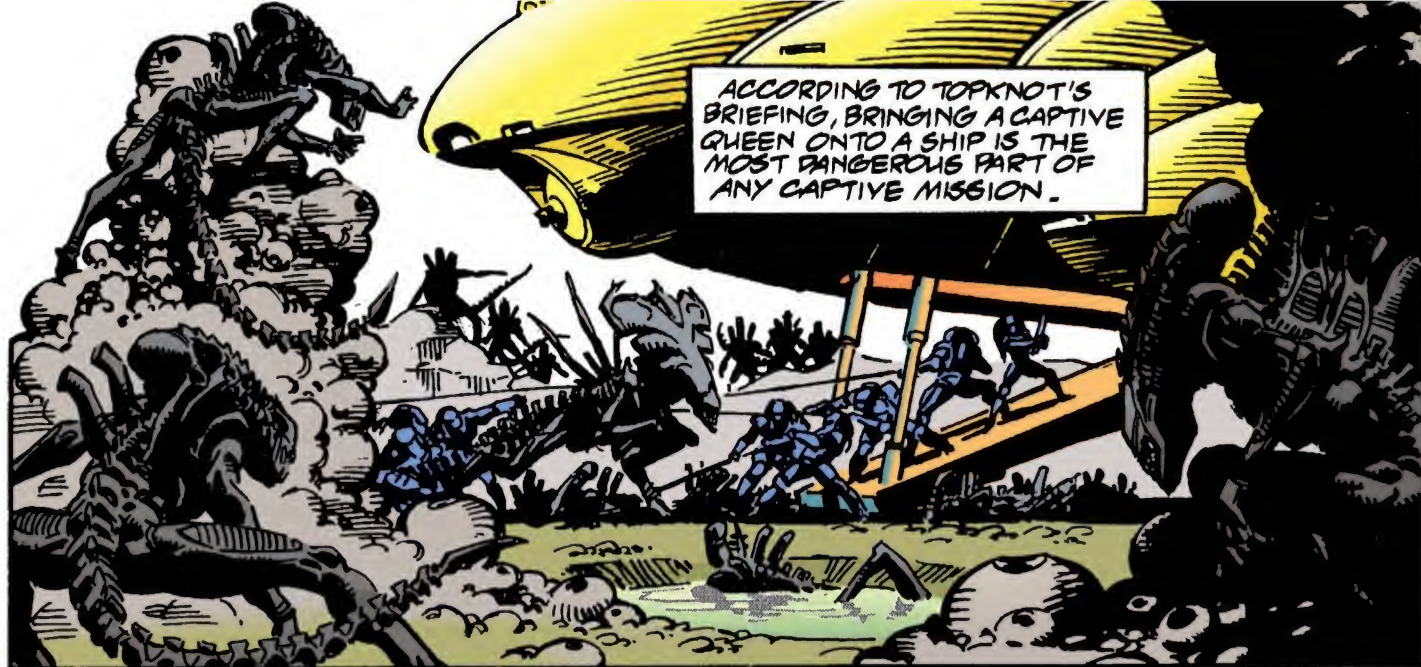
ON THE WAY BACK TO THE SHIP I'M ASSIGNED TO THE ADVANCE GUARD. IT'S A TOKEN POSITION AT BEST. THE QUEEN'S PHEROMONES DO THE WORK OF SCATTERING HER BROOD BEFORE US...



...WHILE THE HONOR OF HAULING OUR PRIZE IS LEFT TO THE OLDER, MORE EXPERIENCED MEMBERS OF THE TROOP.

AS MUCH AS BROKEN TUSK'S MARK ALLOWED ME ENTRANCE TO THIS SOCIETY, MY BEHAVIOR TODAY HAS BRANDED ME AS AN OUTSIDER.

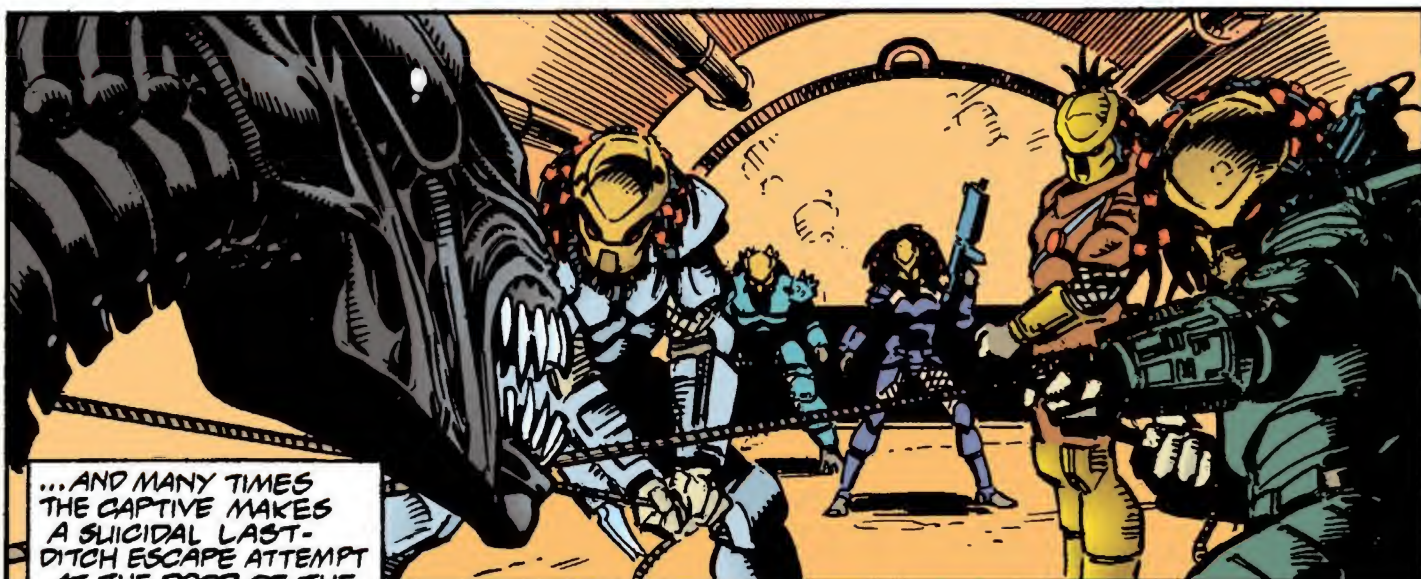
I STILL HAVE MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT THE WAYS OF THE HUNTERS.



ACCORDING TO TOPKNOT'S BRIEFING, BRINGING A CAPTIVE QUEEN ONTO A SHIP IS THE MOST DANGEROUS PART OF ANY CAPTIVE MISSION.



THE TIGHT CONFINES OF A SHIP ALLOW NO MARGIN FOR ERROR-- NO ROOM FOR SLACK...



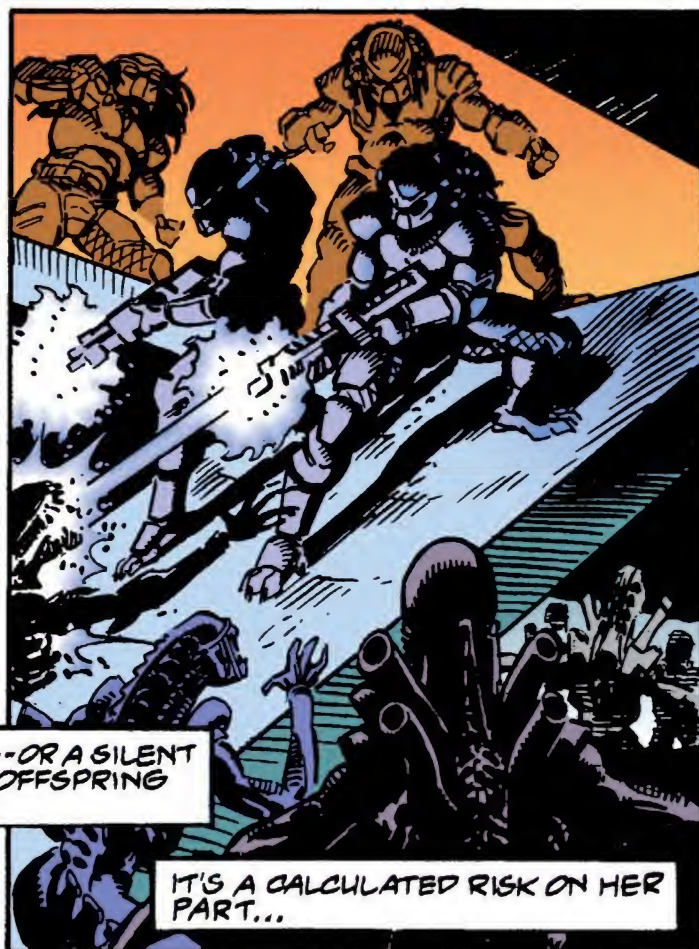
...AND MANY TIMES THE CAPTIVE MAKES A SUICIDAL LAST-DITCH ESCAPE ATTEMPT AT THE DOOR OF THE "NESTING CHAMBER."



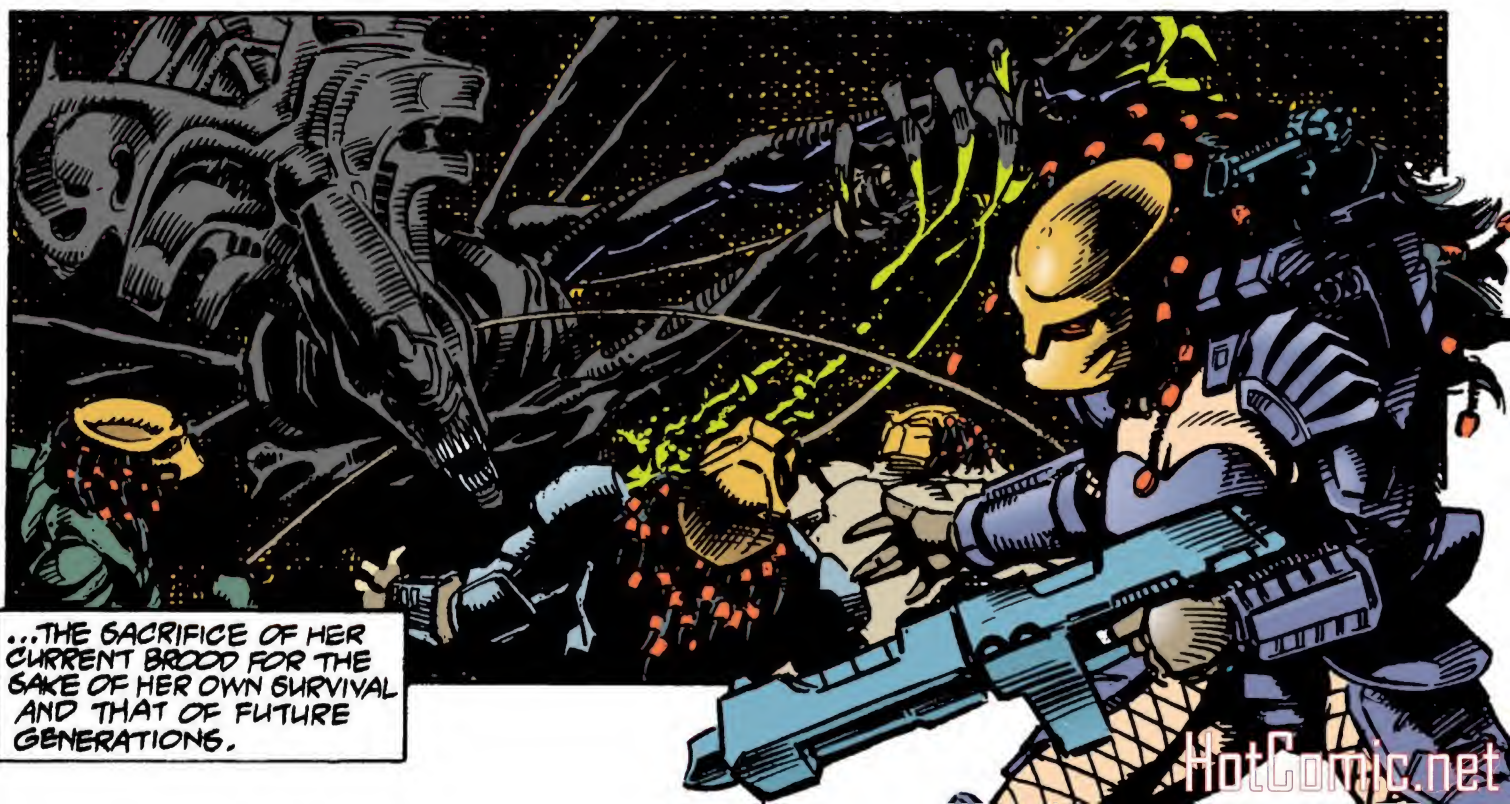
WHAT CATCHES US BY SURPRISE IS THAT THE ATTEMPT IS MADE NOT BY THE QUEEN, BUT BY HER CHILDREN.



AN UNSEEN SIGNAL--OR A SILENT CALL--SPURS HER OFFSPRING INTO ACTION.



IT'S A CALCULATED RISK ON HER PART...

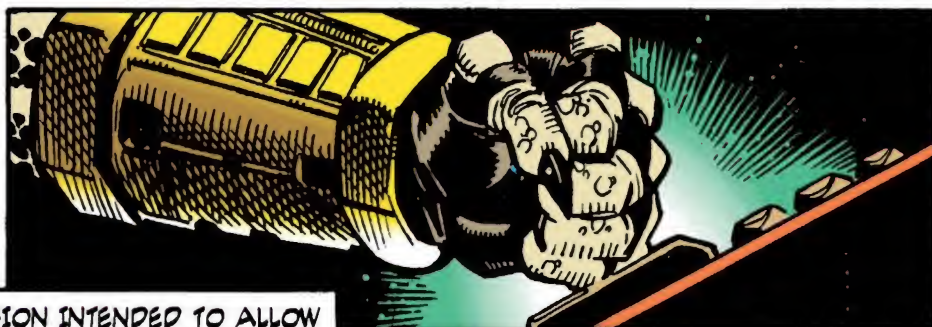


...THE SACRIFICE OF HER CURRENT BROOD FOR THE SAKE OF HER OWN SURVIVAL AND THAT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.



THE QUEEN HAS BROKEN FREE
INSIDE OUR SHIP...

... AND SIGNALLED HER
BROOD TO ATTACK ...



... A DECISION INTENDED TO ALLOW
HER ESCAPE AT THE COST OF THE
LIVES OF HER OWN CHILDREN.



TOPKNOT MAKES A SIMILAR CHOICE -- THE SUCCESS
OF THE MISSION OVER THE LIVES OF SOME OF
HIS HUNTERS.



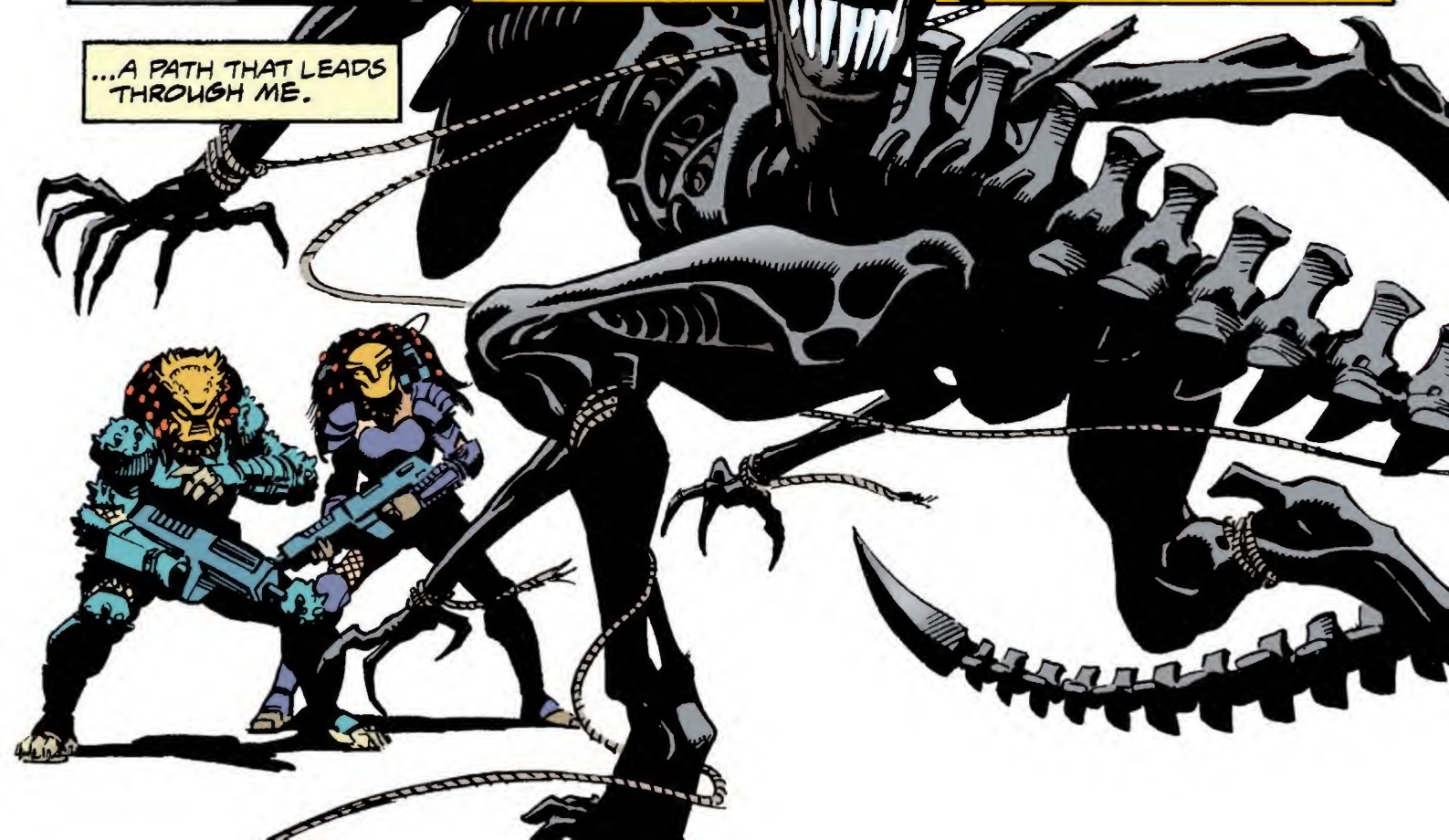


WITH HER EXIT FROM
THE SHIP CUT OFF ...



...THE QUEEN HAS ONLY ONE
DIRECTION LEFT TO HER...

...A PATH THAT LEADS
THROUGH ME.




THE OBJECT OF OUR HUNT--
THE BUGS' QUEEN--BROKE
FREE INSIDE OUR SHIP, BUT
TOPKNOT MANAGED TO
SEAL THE OUTSIDE HATCH.

THE QUEEN HAS ONLY ONE PATH
OPEN TO HER-- DIRECTLY INTO
THE WAITING "NESTING CHAMBER."

THIS IS RIGHT WHERE
WE WANT HER, AND
THE SITUATION WOULD
NEARLY BE UNDER
CONTROL--


--BUT FOR ONE THING--

--I'M INSIDE WITH HER.



MY GUN MOVES
OF ITS OWN
ACCORD. A FEW
WELL-PLACED
BURSTS...

HEEEEEE!



NO. TOO MANY OF MY COM-
PANIONS HAVE PAID WITH
THEIR LIVES TODAY TRYING
TO REACH THIS GOAL. TO
KILL THE QUEEN NOW
WOULD NEGATE THEIR
SACRIFICES.



IN THIS SITUATION,
HONOR OFFERS ONLY
ONE COURSE OF
ACTION--



--RETREAT.

MY BREATH COMES IN RAGGED GASPS, ECHOING INSIDE MY HELMET. MY HEART DRUMS A MACHINE-GUN BEAT IN MY CHEST. MY FEET POUND A COUNTER-RHYTHM ON THE STEEL FLOOR OF THE NESTING CHAMBER.

I DON'T HEAR ANY OF IT.

ALL I'M AWARE OF IS THE SOUND OF THE QUEEN'S PURSUIT...AND MY OWN MORTALITY.

LEAVING RYUSHI AND JOINING THE HUNTERS SEEMED LIKE THE LOGICAL THING--THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

NOW THE DECISION JUST SEEMS STUPID AND VAIN.

WHAT MADE ME THINK THAT I COULD MATCH THE WAYS OF THESE HALF-SAVAGES?

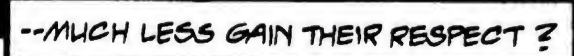
WHAT DID I HOPE TO PROVE TO MYSELF?

CHAK

WHAT MADE ME THINK I
COULD LIVE BY THEIR LAWS--

A comic book illustration of a character with long, dark, curly hair and a blue and white outfit, running towards a large, yellow, triangular object. The background is a dark, textured wall with a large, green, stylized 'W' shape on the right side.

24





I GUESS I'LL WORRY
ABOUT SAVING FACE...



...AFTER I
SAVE MY SKIN.

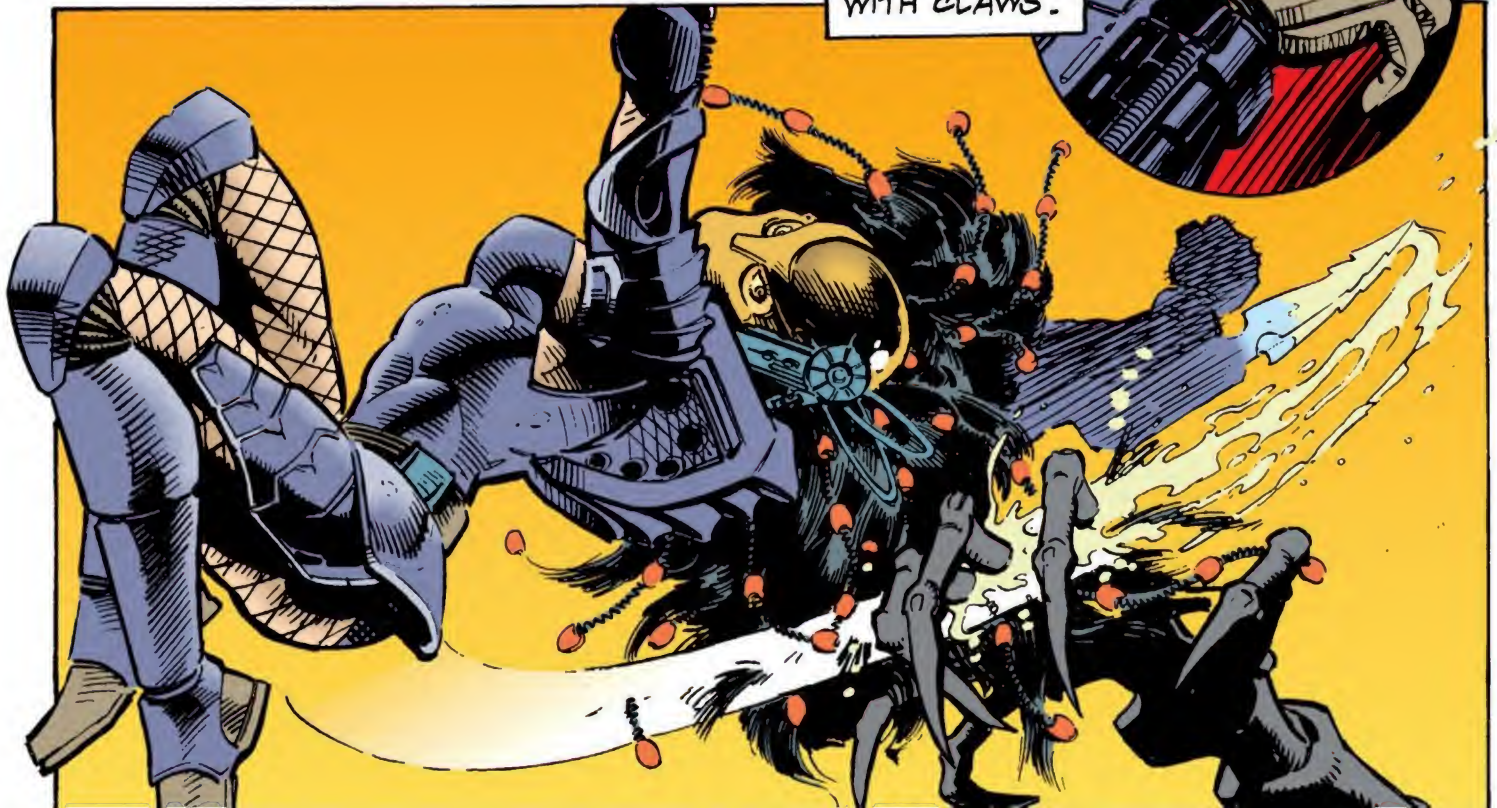


MY "PAL" SHORTY
SEALED THE MAIN
DOOR, BUT THERE'S
MORE THAN ONE
WAY OUT OF ANY
TRAP.

ALTHOUGH, THIS IS
EQUIVALENT TO BEING
IN A TIGER TRAP WITH
THE TIGER.



FORTUNATELY
TIGERS AREN'T
THE ONLY ONES
WITH CLAWS.





SHORTY AND THE BOYS WILL BE DISAPPOINTED, NO DOUBT.

SKREEEE

BLAANG



BUT WHAT DISAPPOINTS THEM MORE...

...THE FACT THAT THERE WASN'T MORE CARNAGE...

...OR THE FACT THAT I'VE MANAGED TO PROVE MYSELF ONE MORE TIME?



WELL?

CLOSE-MOUTHED
BASTARDS. NOT A
WORD... NOT A GESTURE
OF THANKS FOR SAVING
THEIR ASSES.



TYPICAL MALES.

PART 2

script

RANDY STRADLEY

pencils

MIKE MANLEY

JIM HALL

MARK HEIKE

inks

RICARDO VILLAGRÁN

colors

CHRIS CHALENOR

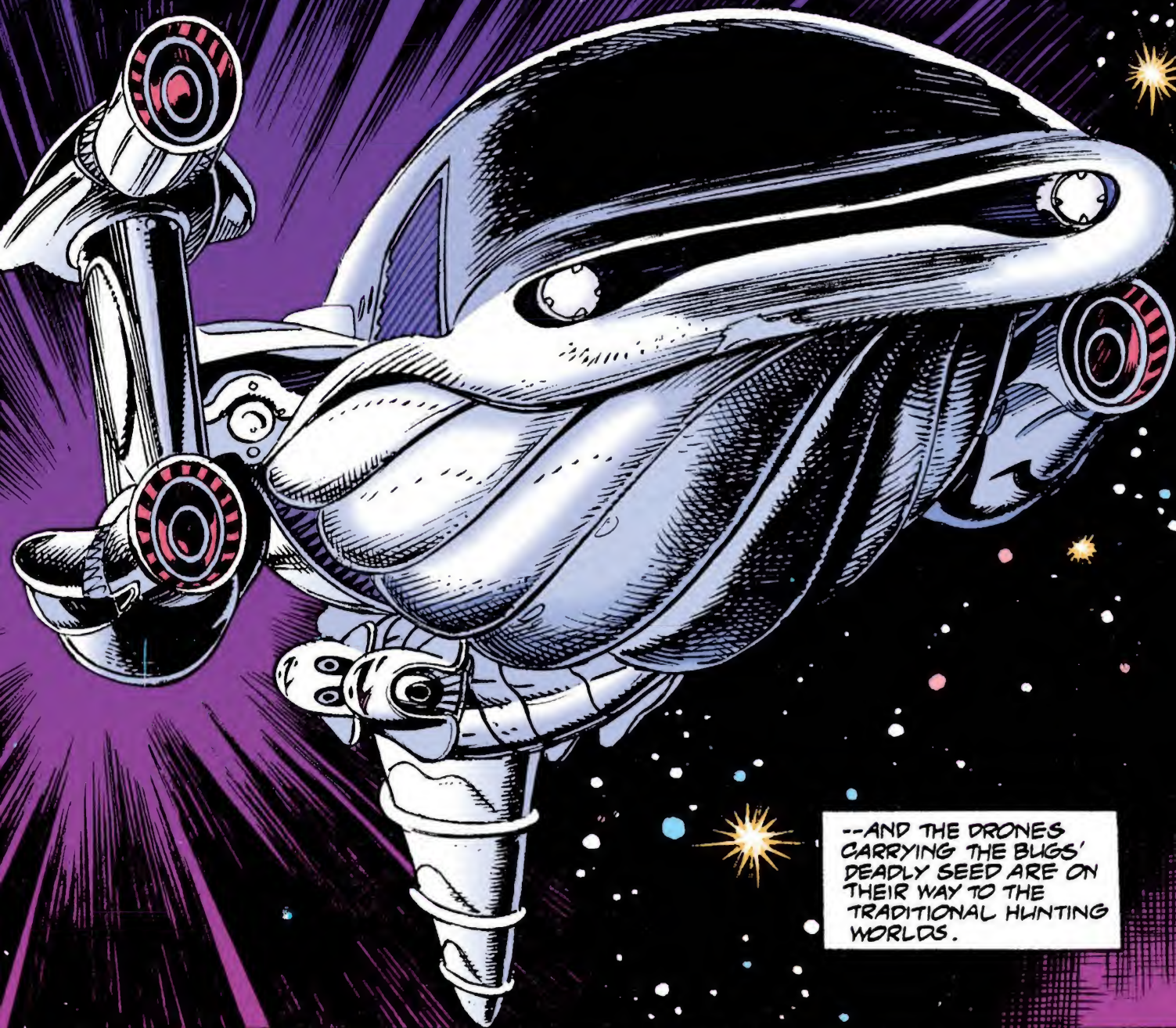
lettering

STEVE DUTRO

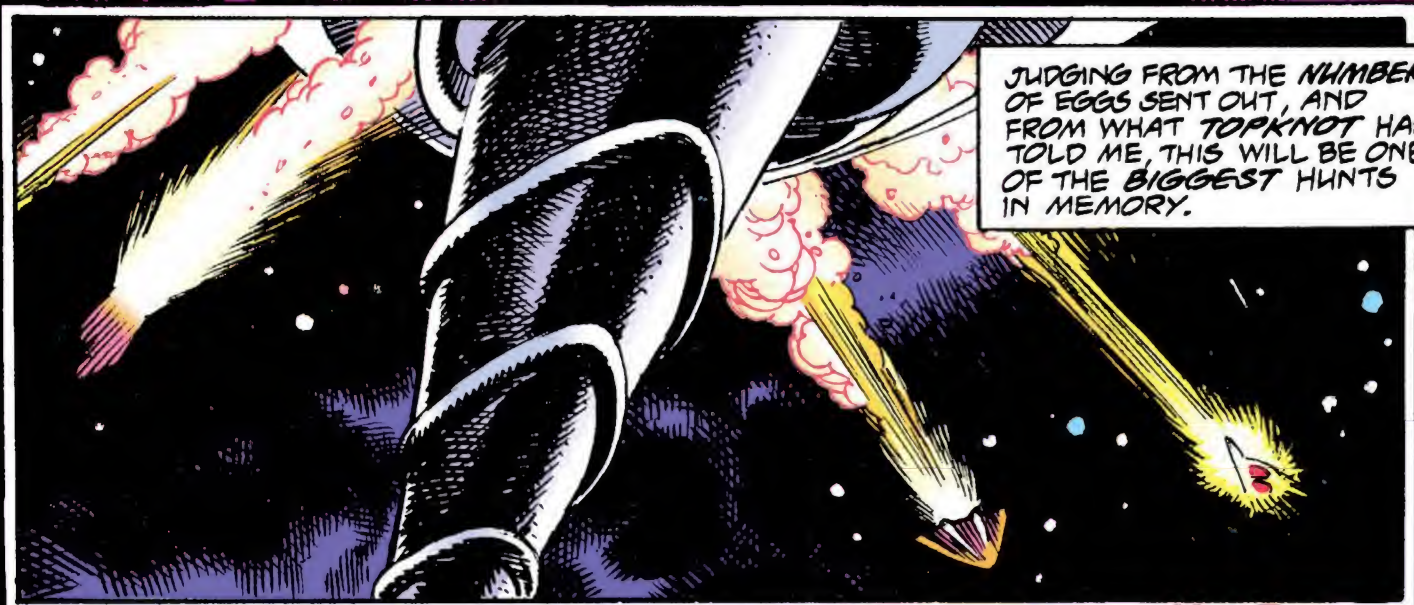


IT'S ALMOST TIME.

THE PREPARATIONS FOR
THE HUNT ARE NEARLY
COMPLETE. THE CLANS
ARE GATHERING--



--AND THE DRONES
CARRYING THE BUGS'
DEADLY SEED ARE ON
THEIR WAY TO THE
TRADITIONAL HUNTING
WORLDS.



JUDGING FROM THE NUMBER
OF EGGS SENT OUT, AND
FROM WHAT TOPKNOT HAS
TOLD ME, THIS WILL BE ONE
OF THE BIGGEST HUNTS
IN MEMORY.



THE HUNT IS THE REASON
I JOINED UP WITH **BROKEN**
THAK'S PEOPLE. I
SHOULD FEEL EXCITED.



INSTEAD, ALL I
FEEL IS *ALONE*.

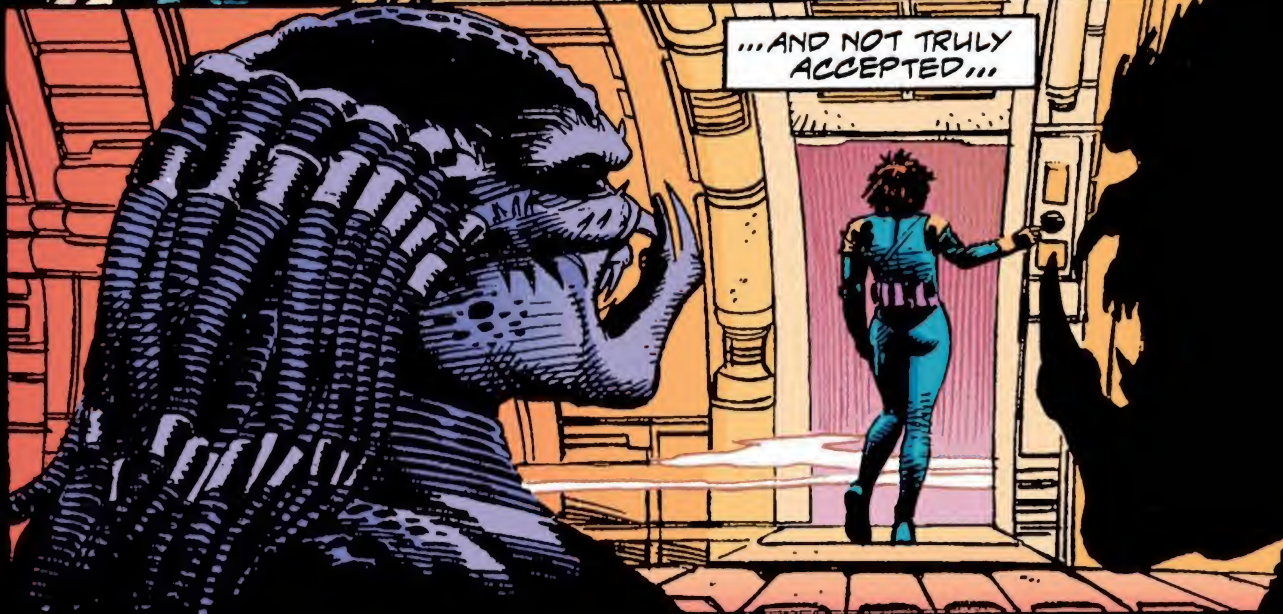
MACHIKO NOGUCHI.
COULDN'T MAKE IT
IN HUMAN SOCIETY,
SO SHE JOINED UP
WITH A BUNCH OF
XTs. LIKE IT WOULD
BE ANY EASIER.



HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S
BEEN OVER A YEAR
SINCE I CAME TO
LIVE WITH THE HUNTERS.
AN OUTSIDER ACCEPTED
AS AN EQUAL.



NO, THAT'S
WRONG. NOT
REALLY AN
EQUAL...

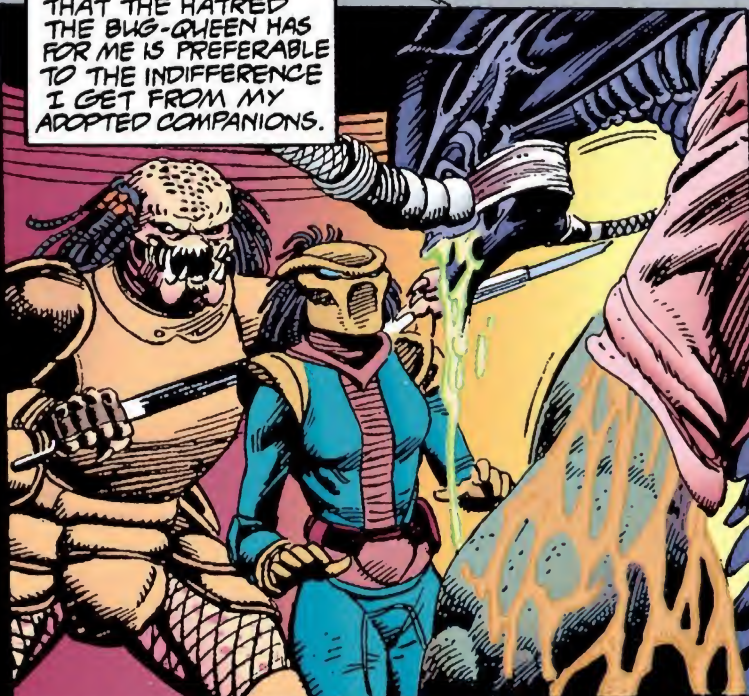


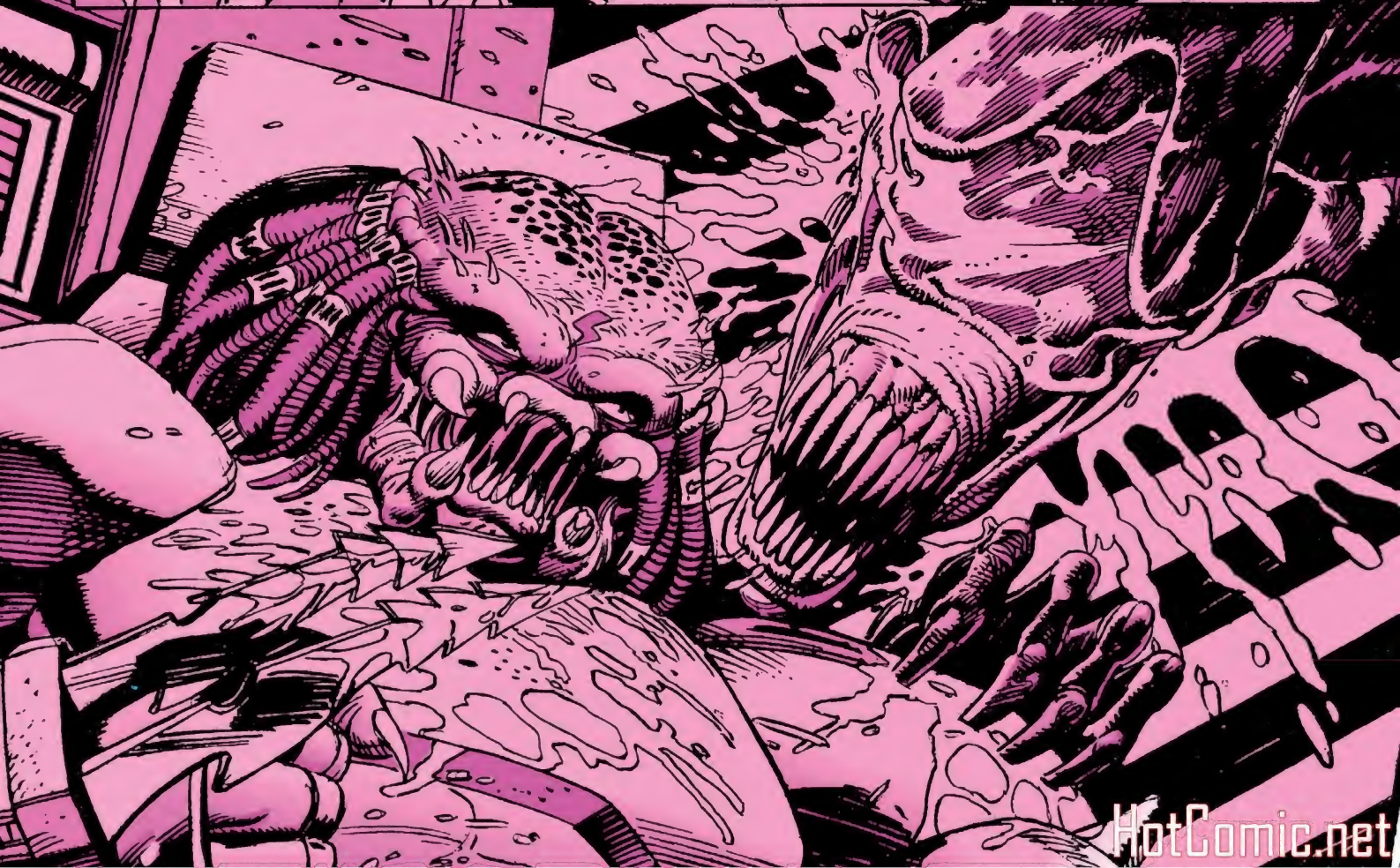
...AND NOT TRULY
ACCEPTED...

...NO MATTER
HOW MANY TIMES
I'VE PROVEN
MYSELF.



SOMETIMES I THINK
THAT THE HATRED
THE BUG-QUEEN HAS
FOR ME IS PREFERABLE
TO THE INDIFFERENCE
I GET FROM MY
ADOPTED COMPANIONS.

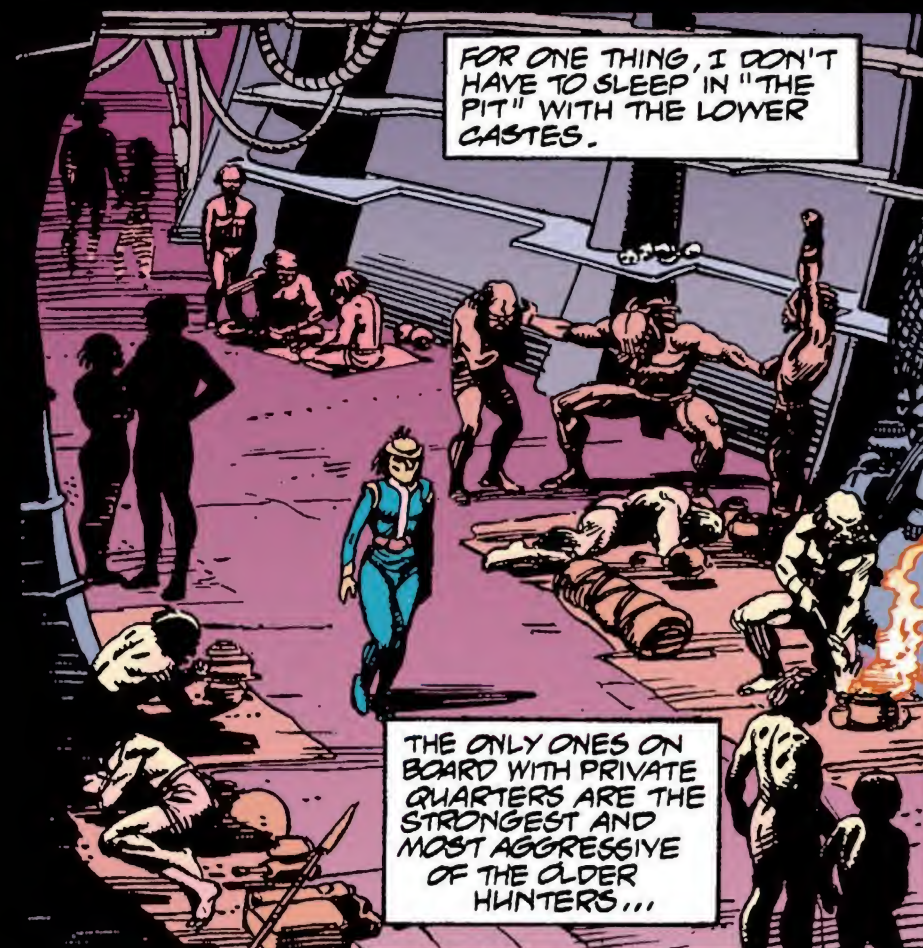




THERE ARE SOME
ADVANTAGES TO
BEING "DIFFERENT."



FOR ONE THING, I DON'T
HAVE TO SLEEP IN "THE
PIT" WITH THE LOWER
CASTES.



THE ONLY ONES ON
BOARD WITH PRIVATE
QUARTERS ARE THE
STRONGEST AND
MOST AGGRESSIVE
OF THE OLDER
HUNTERS...



...AND ME.



IT'S NOT MUCH,
BUT IT'S HOME.

MAYBE IT WOULD HAVE
BEEN DIFFERENT IF
BROKEN TUSK HAD
LIVED. *MAYBE*. WE
WERE THROWN TOGETHER
UNDER UNUSUAL
CIRCUMSTANCES.

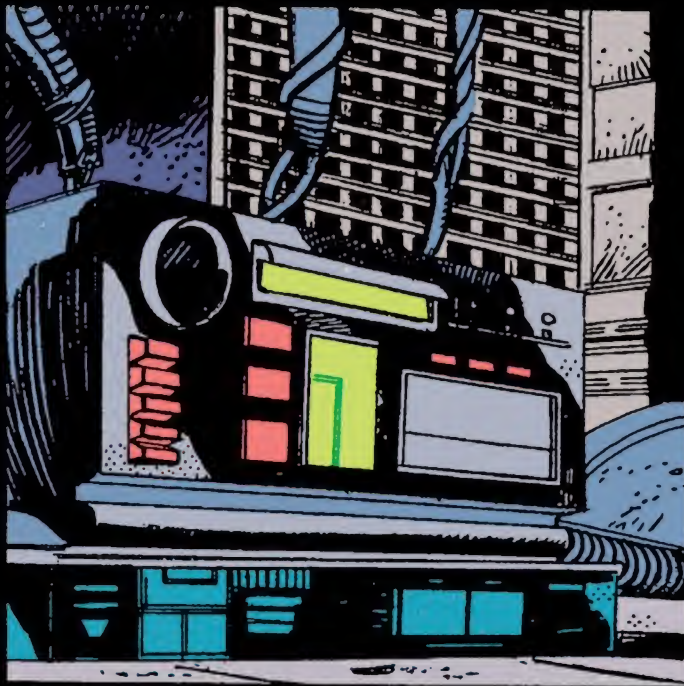
PERHAPS IN ANY OTHER
SITUATION HE WOULD
HAVE BEEN NO DIFFER-
ENT THAN ANY OF HIS
PEOPLE...

...AND I'D BE A
TROPHY
HANGING ON
HIS WALL
NOW.

MAYBE
THIS MARK
I BEAR
MEANS LESS
THAN I
THINK IT
DOES.

MAYBE **BROKEN TUSK** FELT
CONFIDENT ENOUGH IN HIS
RANK WITHIN THE CLAN TO
ALLOW HIMSELF FEELINGS
OF RESPECT FOR ME...

...OR MAYBE IT
WAS HIS DYING
JOKE.



I DON'T KNOW WHY I BROUGHT THIS WITH ME FROM MY CABIN ON RYUSHI.



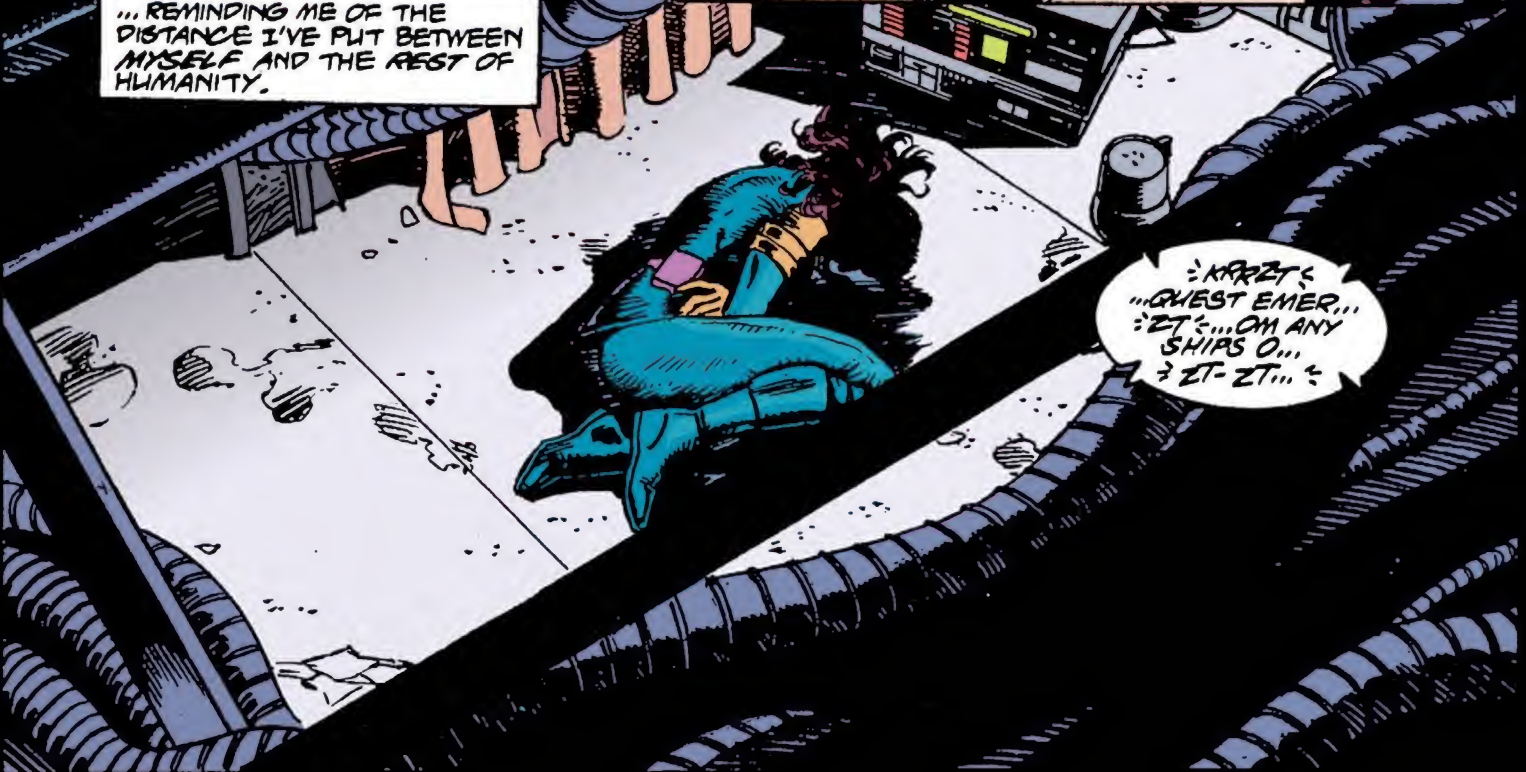
USUALLY ALL I GET IS STATIC.



ON THE RARE OCCASIONS WHEN I DO PICK UP VOICES, THEY'RE ONLY GARBLED BITS OF CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN OTHER PEOPLE...

ZZZT...
...FEAT...
...CRACKLE...
...SIS--
OUT OF...

... REMINDING ME OF THE DISTANCE I'VE PUT BETWEEN MYSELF AND THE REST OF HUMANITY.



...KRRZT...
...QUEST EMER...
...ZT... ON ANY
SHIPS O...
...ZT-ZT...
...

...REPEAT:
THIS IS THE SHUTTLE
FROM THE WEYLAND-YUTANI
CRUISER NEMESIS--OUT
OF FUEL AND ADRIFT.
REQUEST EMERGENCY
ASSISTANCE FROM ANY
SHIPS OR HUMAN
OUTPOSTS RECEIVING
THIS MESSAGE...

GIVE
IT A REST,
ELLIS.



THINK ABOUT IT,
DICKWEED. ANYBODY
WHO MIGHT HEAR YOU
WILL HAVE PICKED UP
OUR DISTRESS
BEACON HOURS
BEFORE.

LET ELLIS TALK,
IF IT MAKES HIM
FEEL BETTER. WE
ALL HAVE TO DEAL
WITH THE STRESS
IN OUR OWN WAY.

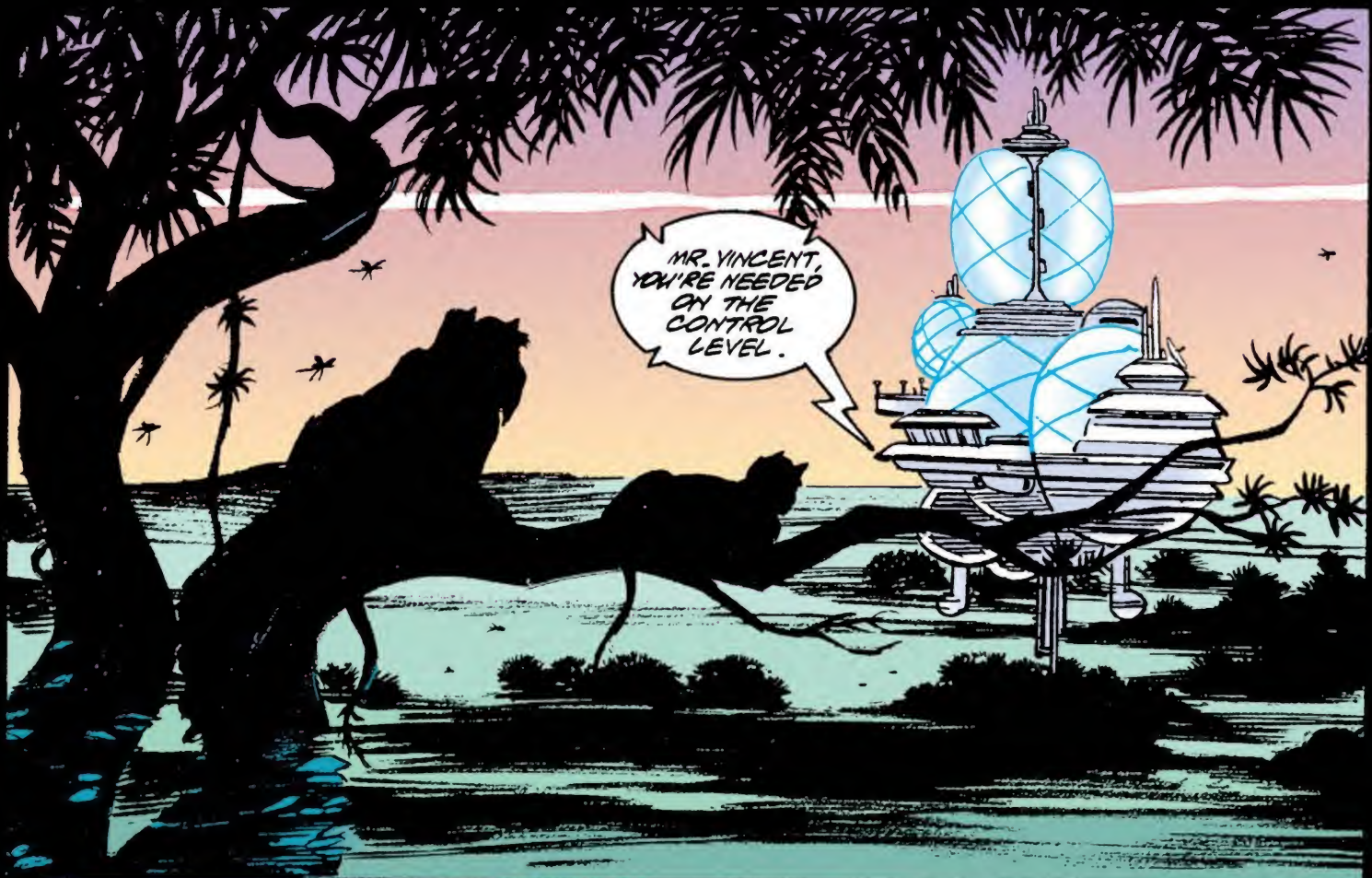
NEMESIS
SHUTTLE, THIS
IS BUNDA SURVEY.
WE READ YOU
FOUR-BY-FOUR,
OVER.

BUNDA
SURVEY, THIS
IS NEMESIS
SHUTTLE!

GO AHEAD
AND DO NOTHING
JESS--I'M GONNA
GET US
RESCUED!

YEAH?
WELL, I'M
GONNA
DEAL WITH
HIM IF HE
DOESN'T--

KEEP 'IM
TALKIN', ELLIS!
WHAT'S THE
MATTER WITH
YOU?



MR. VINCENT,
YOU'RE NEEDED
ON THE
CONTROL
LEVEL.



ROGER, NEMESIS
SHUTTLE. WE'RE
DISPATCHING A SHIP
TO YOUR POSITION.
E.T.A.--- SIX HOURS.

WHAT
HAVE YOU
GOT,
CABOT?

A
DISTRESS
CALL FROM
A LOST
SHUTTLE.

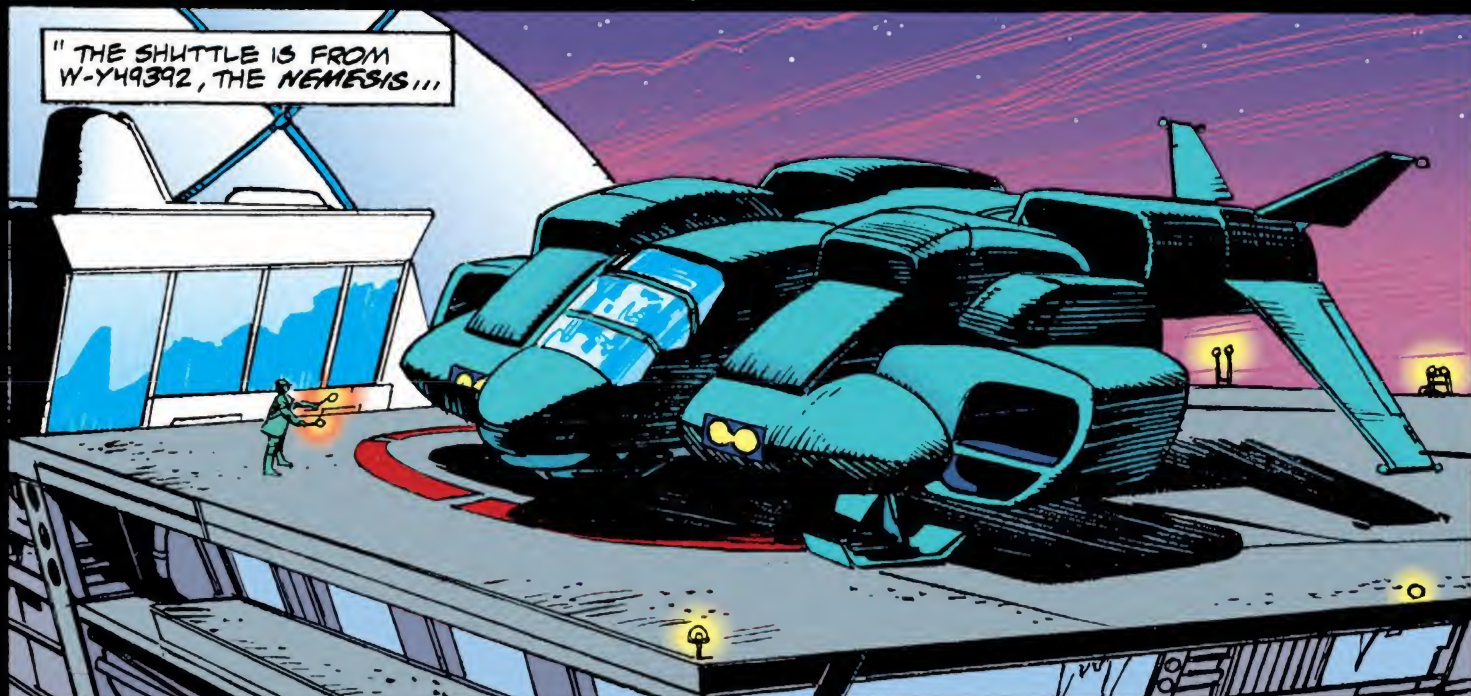


CAN
WE HELP
THEM?

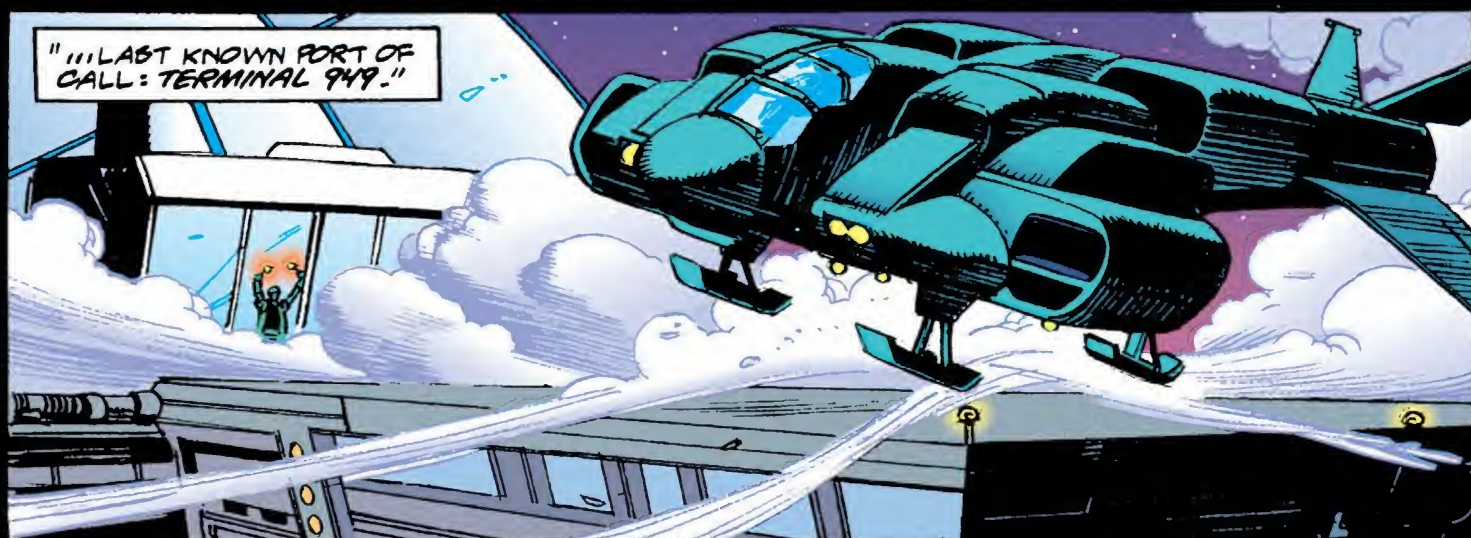
THEY SAY THAT IF WE CAN GET
FUEL TO THEM, THEY CAN COME
DOWN UNDER THEIR OWN
POWER. OUR D-SHIP IS
WARMING UP RIGHT NOW,
MR. VINCENT.

AND?

"THE SHUTTLE IS FROM
W-Y49392, THE NEMESIS..."

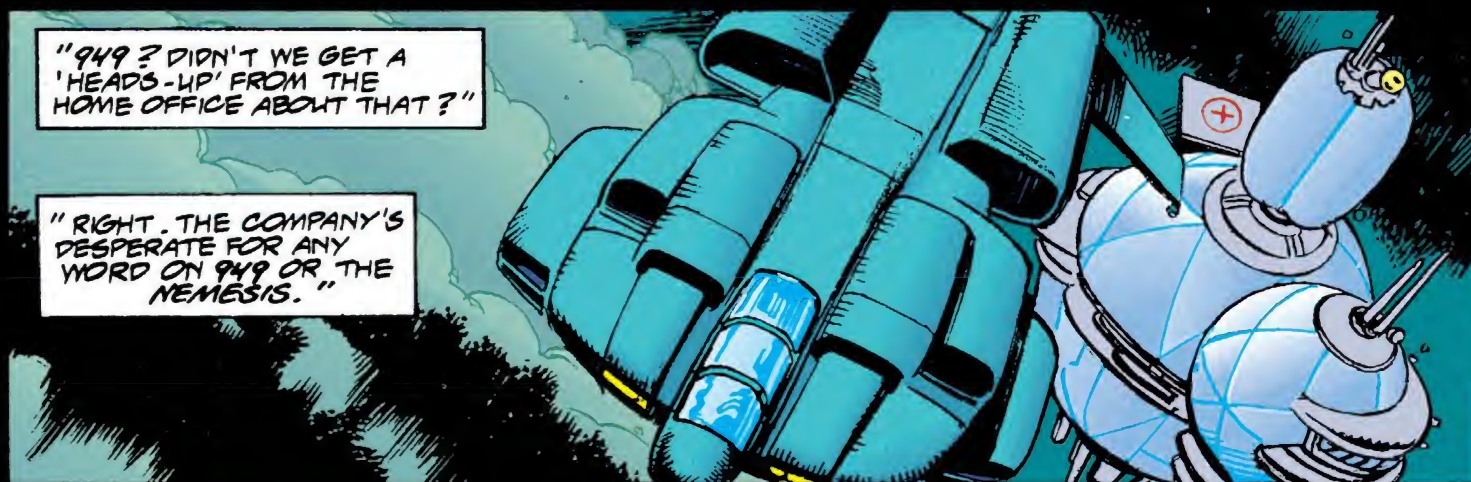


"...LAST KNOWN PORT OF
CALL: TERMINAL 949..."



"949? DIDN'T WE GET A
'HEADS-UP' FROM THE
HOME OFFICE ABOUT THAT?"

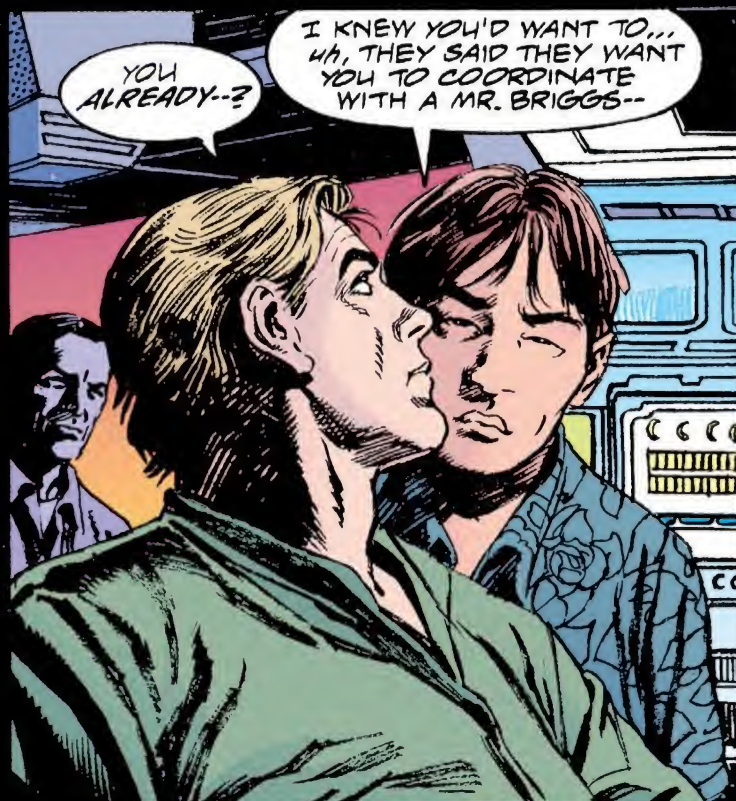
"RIGHT. THE COMPANY'S
DESPERATE FOR ANY
WORD ON 949 OR THE
NEMESIS."



"SET UP A LINK
WITH THE H.O."



"UH, I ALREADY
DID, MR. VINCENT..."



YOU
ALREADY--?

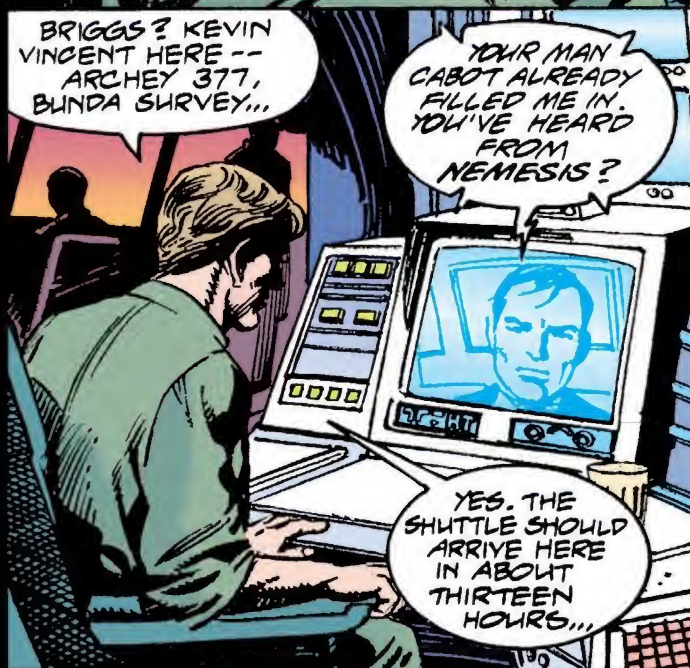
I KNEW YOU'D WANT TO...
WH, THEY SAID THEY WANT
YOU TO COORDINATE
WITH A MR. BRIGGS--



HE... MR. BRIGGS, THAT
IS, IS ALREADY EN ROUTE.
HE'S WAITING FOR YOU
ON COM 6...

THANK
YOU, MR.
CABOT.

EVERYBODY
BACK TO
WORK.



BRIGGS? KEVIN
VINCENT HERE --
ARCHEY 377,
BLUNDA SURVEY...

YOUR MAN
CABOT ALREADY
FILLED ME IN.
YOU'VE HEARD
FROM
NEMESIS?

YES. THE
SHUTTLE SHOULD
ARRIVE HERE
IN ABOUT
THIRTEEN
HOURS...



THAT'LL
MAKE IT
11:00 A.M.
LOCAL
TIME--

WHATEVER. LISTEN--
EARTHSIDE WANTS
ME TO HANDLE
THIS PERSONALLY,
BUT I'M STILL
TWENTY-FIVE HOURS
AWAY.

I'M GOING
TO GIVE YOU
A CODE WORD,
VINCENT. CANCER
BLACK.

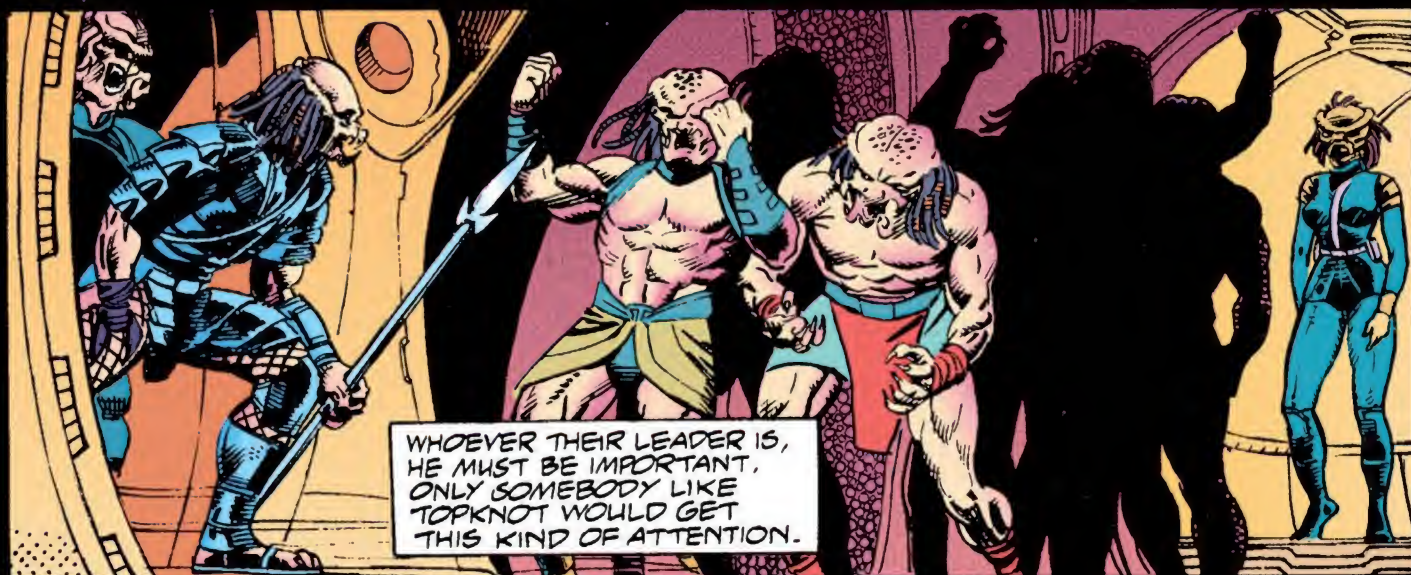
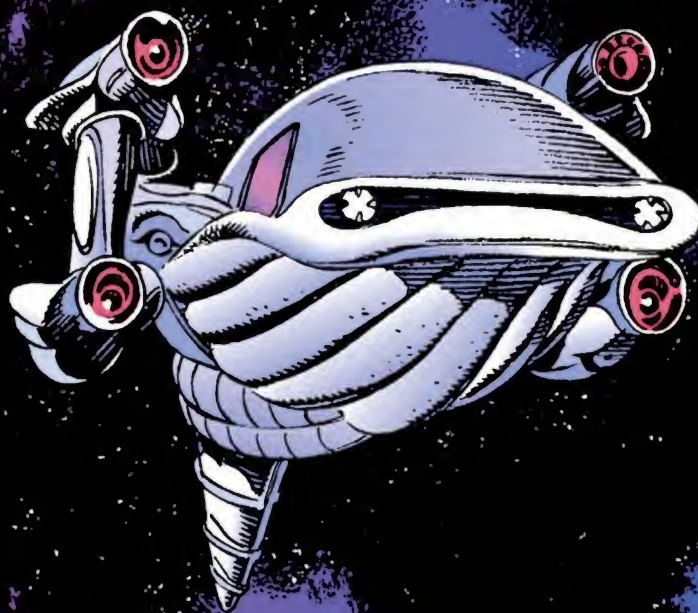


DO YOU
UNDERSTAND,
VINCENT?

B-BUT
THAT'S--

KEEP
IT QUIET
UNTIL I
GET
THERE.

THE LAST STRAGGLERS
FROM THE CLAN HAVE
ARRIVED. THE FIGHTING
WILL BEGIN SOON.



WHOEVER THEIR LEADER IS,
HE MUST BE IMPORTANT.
ONLY SOMEBODY LIKE
TOPKNOT WOULD GET
THIS KIND OF ATTENTION.



STILL YOUNG, BUT WITH
SCARS THAT WOULD DO
A VETERAN PROUD...





IT'S HUMAN...

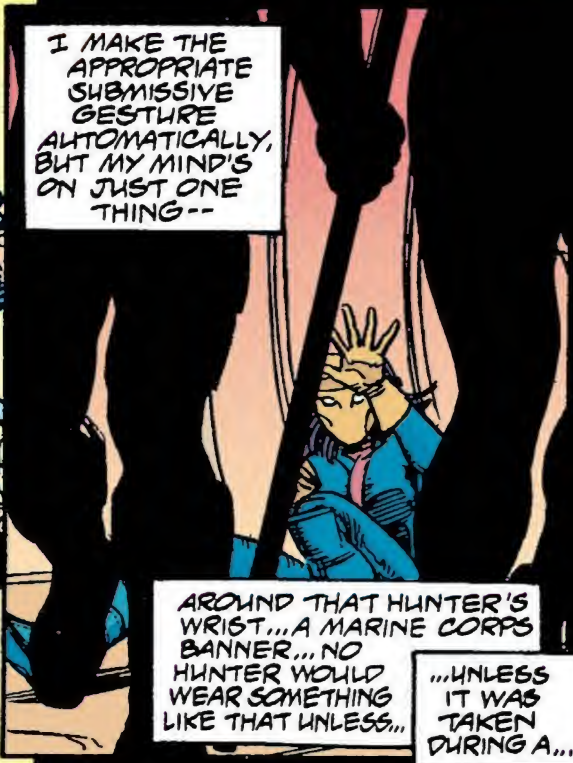
...MADE BY HUMANS... MARINE...



MISTAKE. STUPID.



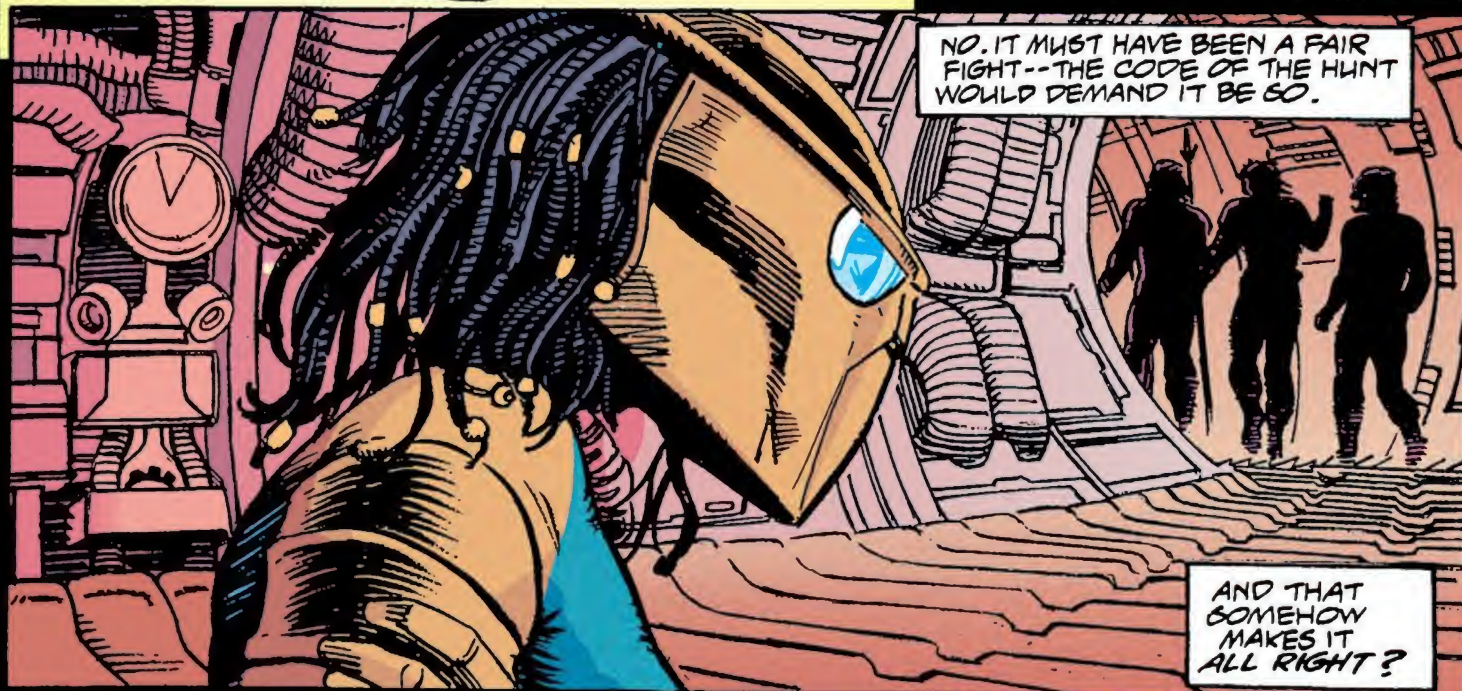
I DESERVE WHAT I GET.



I MAKE THE APPROPRIATE SUBMISSIVE GESTURE AUTOMATICALLY, BUT MY MIND'S ON JUST ONE THING--

AROUND THAT HUNTER'S WRIST... A MARINE CORPS BANNER... NO HUNTER WOULD WEAR SOMETHING LIKE THAT UNLESS...

...UNLESS IT WAS TAKEN DURING A...



NO. IT MUST HAVE BEEN A FAIR FIGHT--THE CODE OF THE HUNT WOULD DEMAND IT BE SO.

AND THAT SOMEHOW MAKES IT ALL RIGHT?

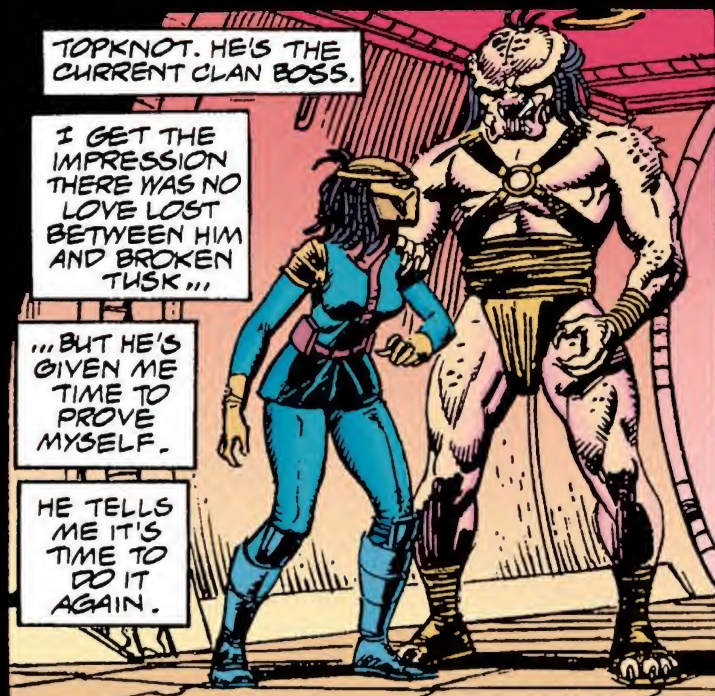


TOPKNOT. HE'S THE CURRENT CLAN BOSS.

I GET THE IMPRESSION THERE WAS NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN HIM AND BROKEN TUSK...

...BUT HE'S GIVEN ME TIME TO PROVE MYSELF.

HE TELLS ME IT'S TIME TO DO IT AGAIN.



THAT'S THE FIRST THING I LEARNED ABOUT HUNTER CULTURE -- YOU'RE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR LAST FIGHT. AND THAT GOES FOR EVERY MEMBER OF THE CLAN...

...INCLUDING ME, INCLUDING TOPKNOT. IN THAT RESPECT, WE'RE ALL EQUALS.

"FIGHT 'SHORTY,'" HE SIGNS TO ME.



"I KNOW."

THE SECOND THING I LEARNED WAS THAT I'M THE LEAST AMONG EQUALS.

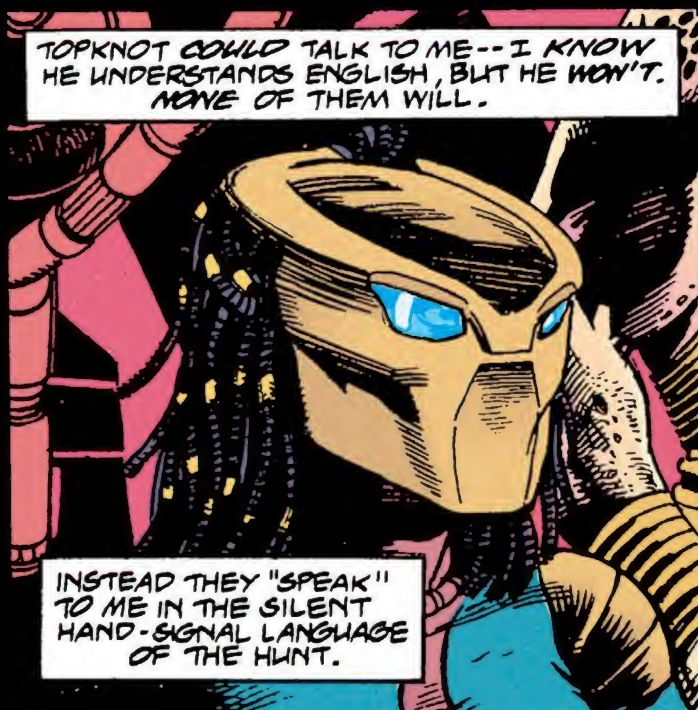


TOPKNOT COULD TALK TO ME -- I KNOW HE UNDERSTANDS ENGLISH, BUT HE WON'T. NONE OF THEM WILL.

THE SIGNS WERE NEVER INTENDED TO CONVEY COMPLICATED THOUGHTS, BUT TOPKNOT'S MESSAGE IS CLEAR ENOUGH.

"THOSE WITHOUT HONOR ARE NOT PART OF THE HUNT/CLAN, AND THOSE WHO DO NOT FIGHT FOR THEIR HONOR HAVE NO HONOR."

INSTEAD THEY "SPEAK" TO ME IN THE SILENT HAND-SIGNAL LANGUAGE OF THE HUNT.

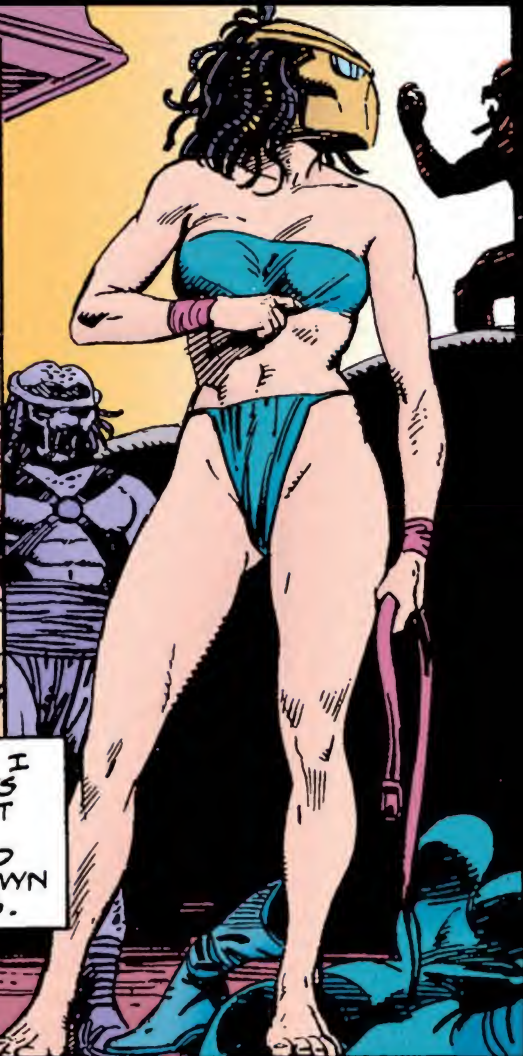




SO I HAVE TO FIGHT--
SCRABBLE FOR MY
SPOT IN THE PECKING
ORDER.



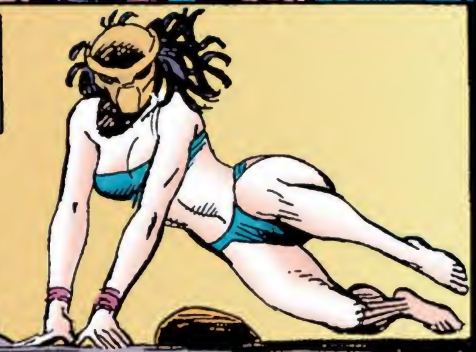
AND THAT
MEANS
SHORTY.



I GUESS I
ALWAYS
KNEW IT
WOULD
HAVE TO
COME DOWN
TO THIS.



I WISH IT
WASN'T SO
HOT IN
HERE.



SHORTY'S SMALL FOR A
HUNTER, BUT HE'S BIG
ENOUGH. HE GETS A
HAND ON ME AND THE
FIGHT'S OVER.



GOT TO MAKE SURE
THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN...
TRUST THAT MY TRAINING...

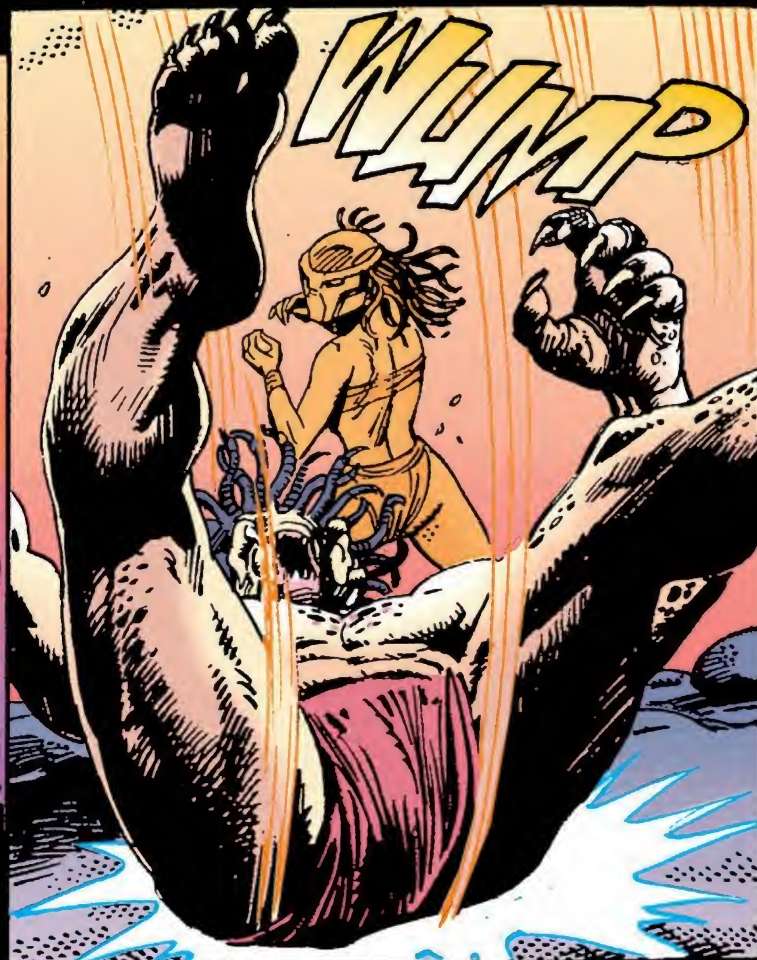


MAYLEY
DILLON

HotComic.net



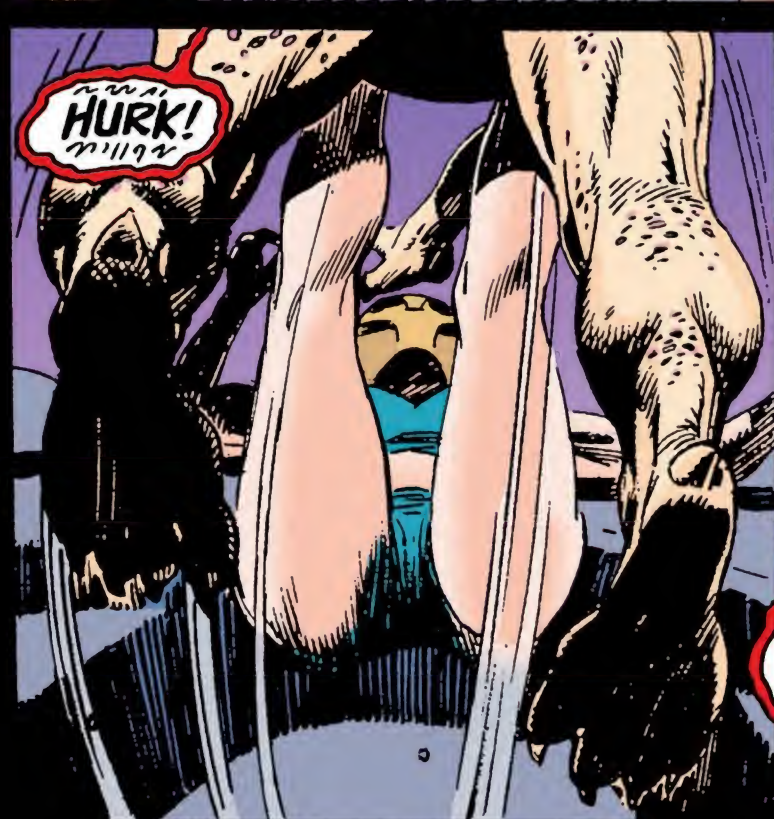
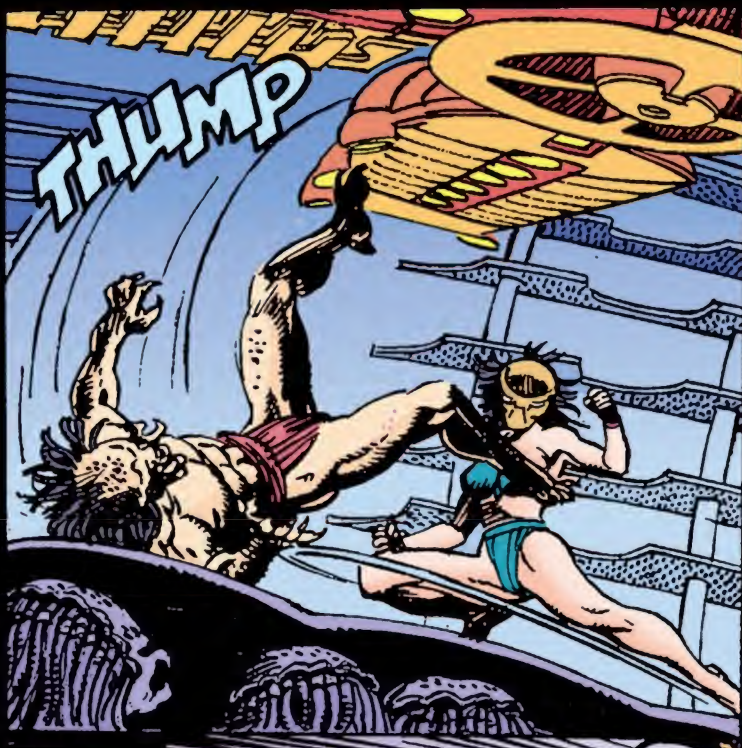
...IS ENOUGH TO
COUNTERACT
HIS STRENGTH.



NOW
HE'S
MAD.

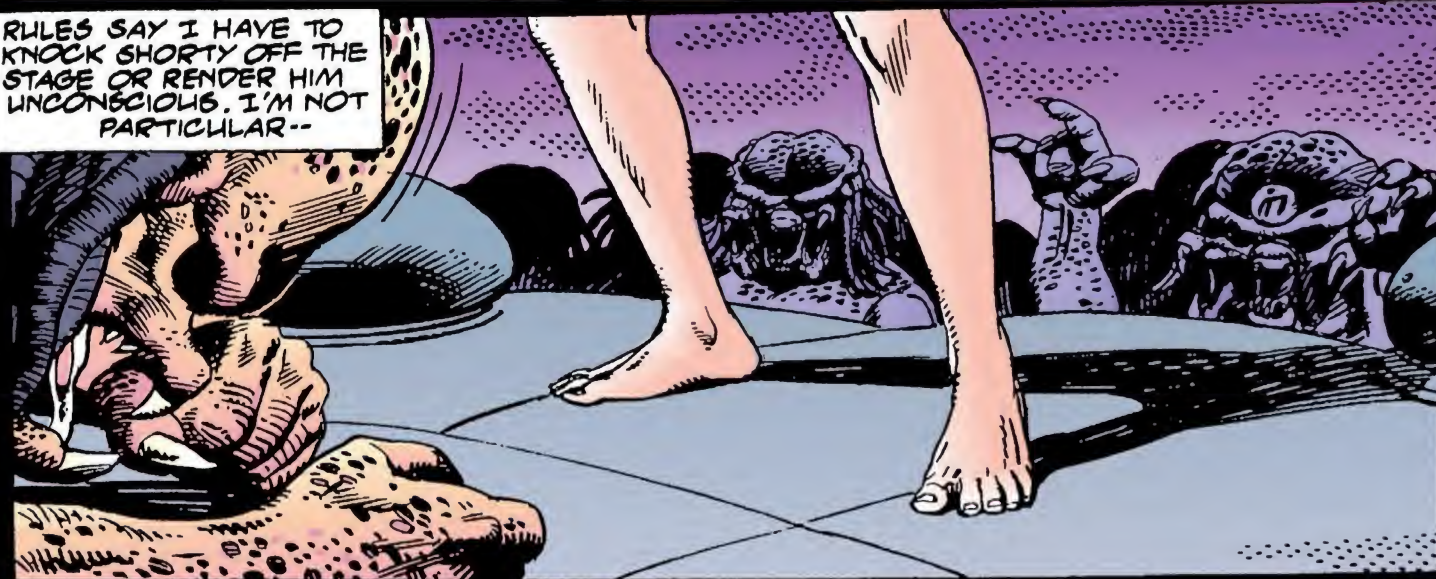


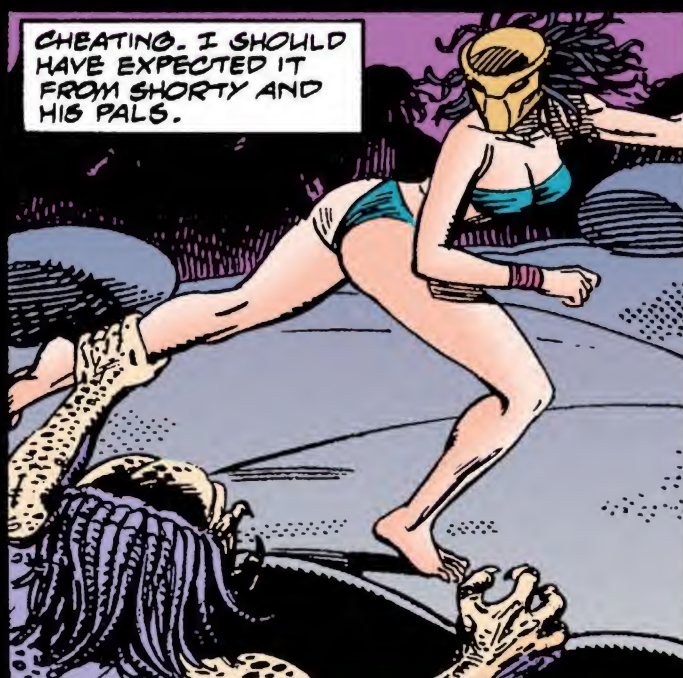
GOOD, MAYBE I
CAN USE THAT TO
MY ADVANTAGE.

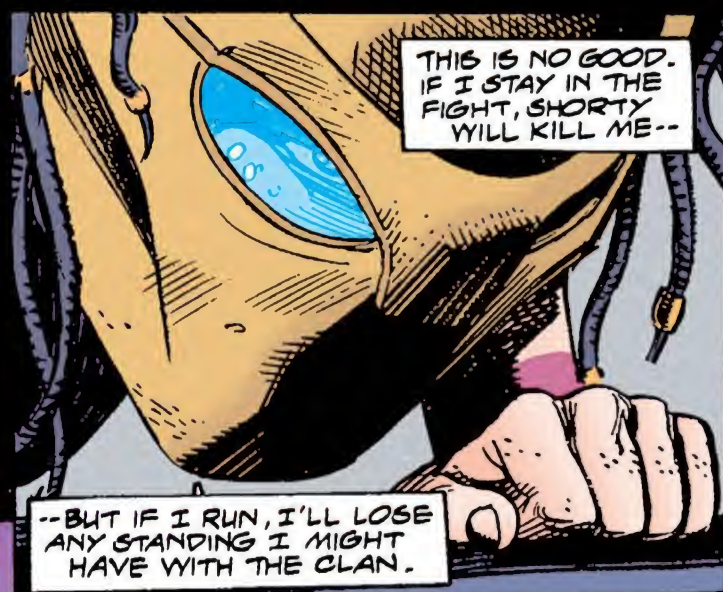




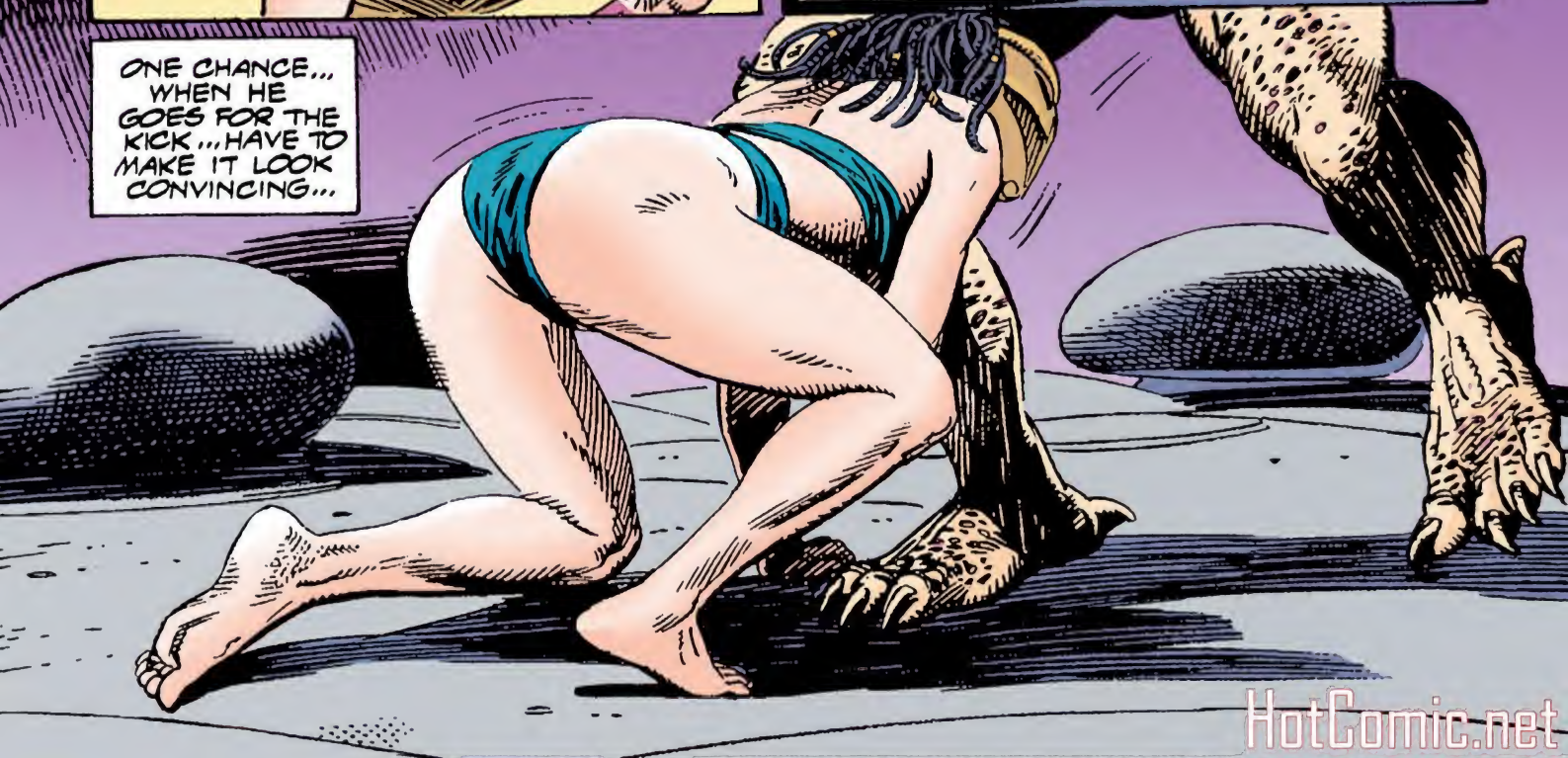
RULES SAY I HAVE TO
KNOCK SHORTY OFF THE
STAGE OR RENDER HIM
UNCONSCIOUS. I'M NOT
PARTICULAR--

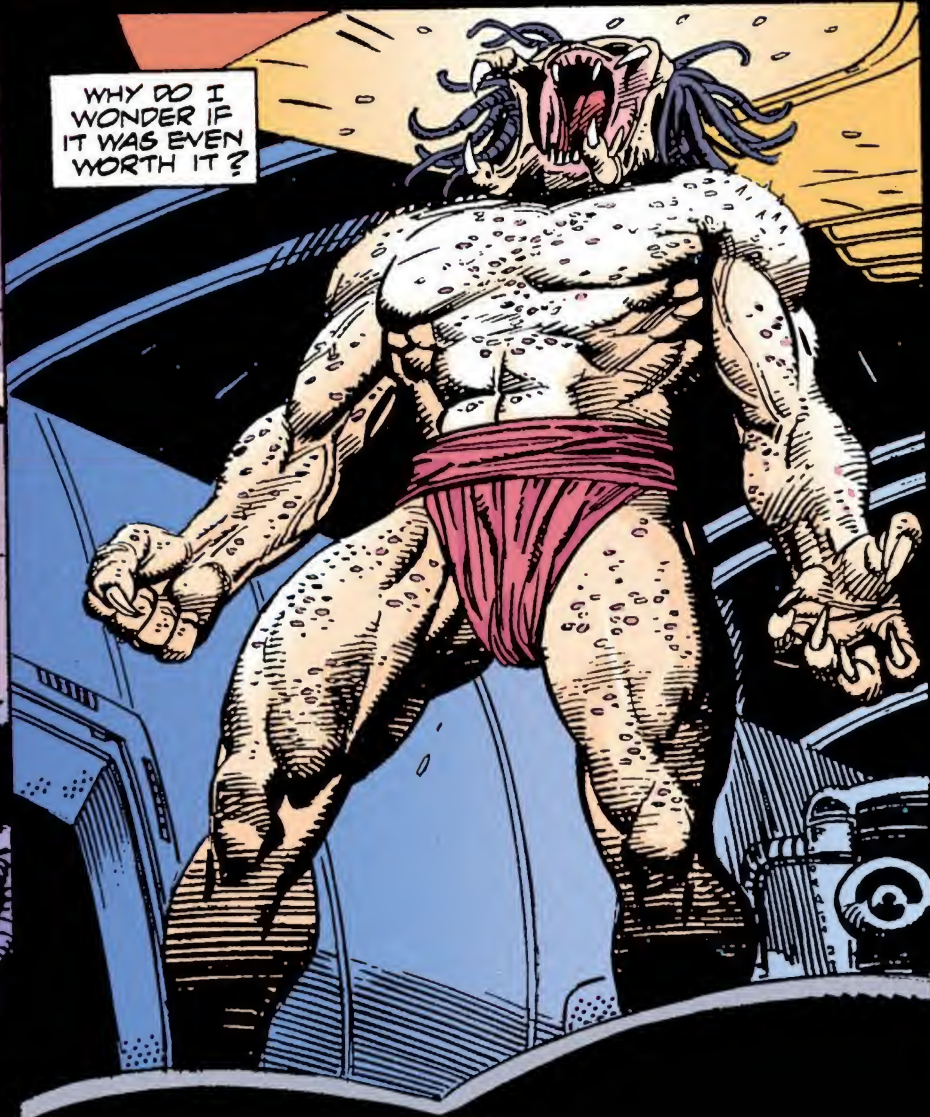
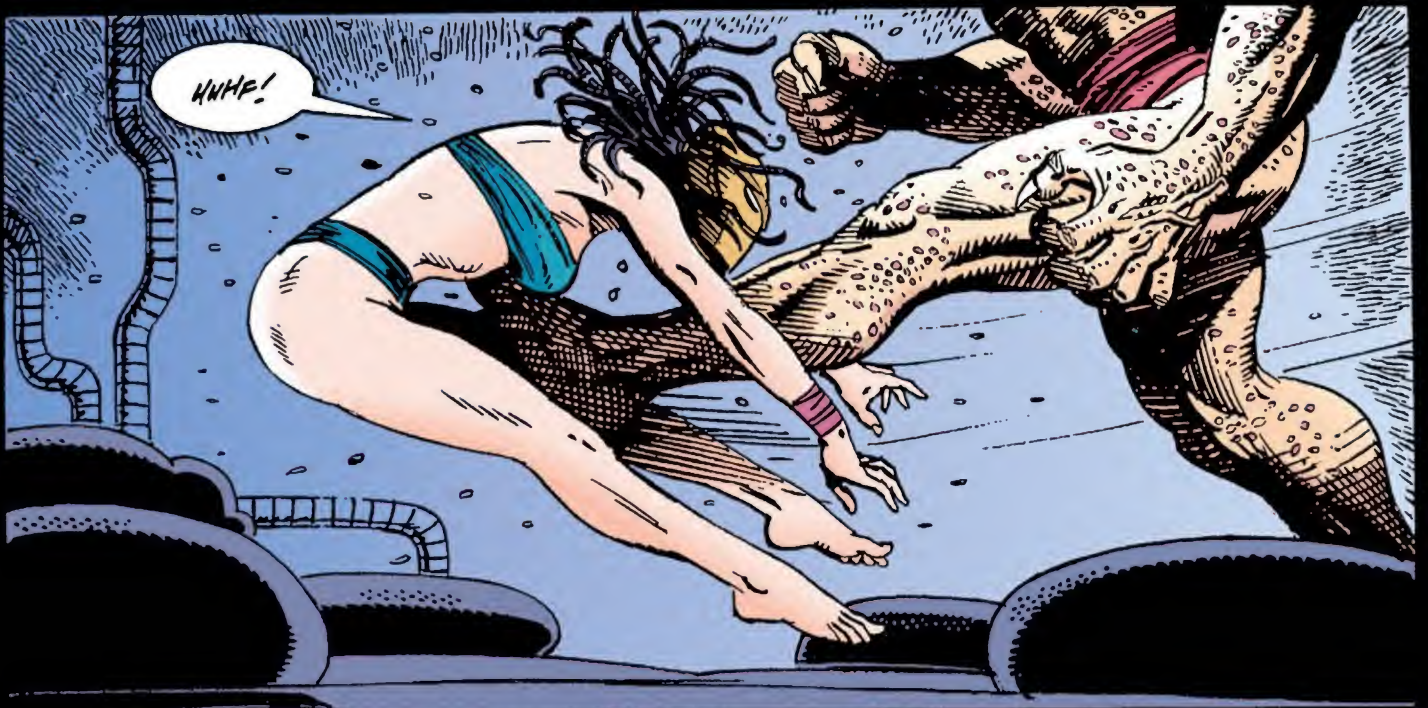




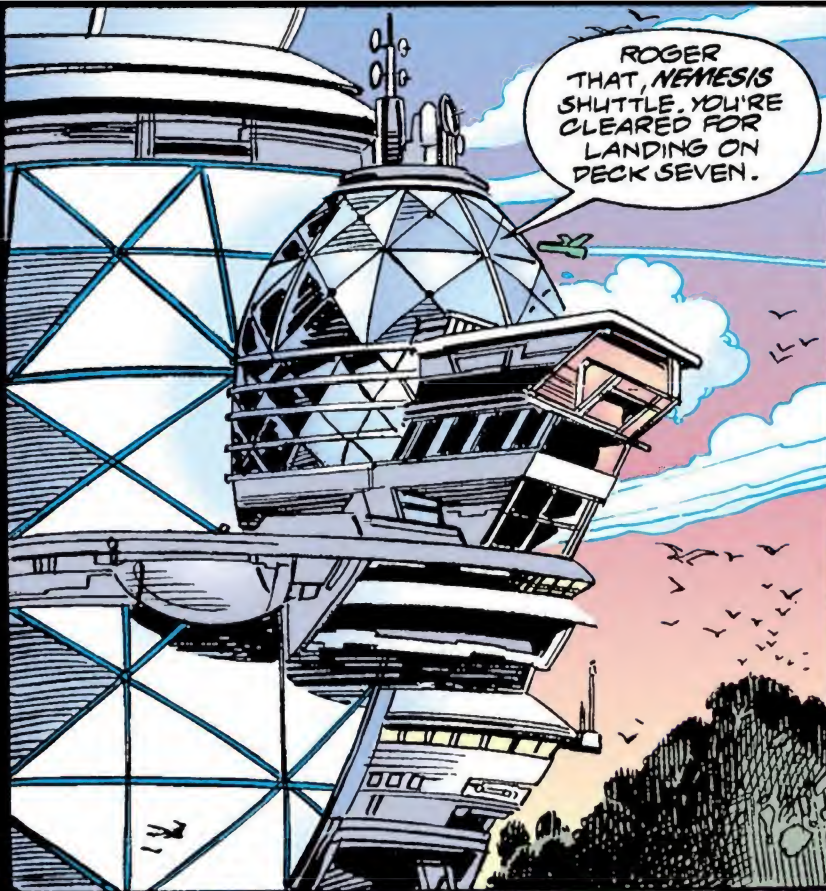


ONE CHANCE...
WHEN HE
GOES FOR THE
KICK...HAVE TO
MAKE IT LOOK
CONVINCING...







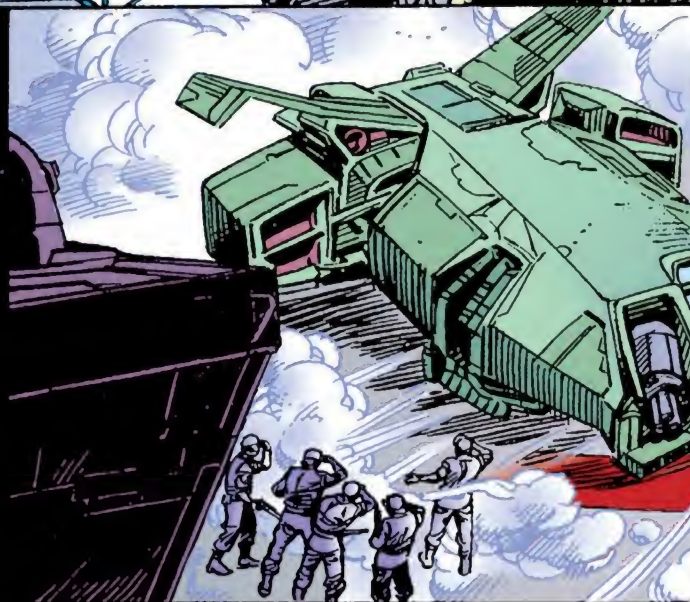


ROGER THAT, NEMESIS SHUTTLE. YOU'RE CLEARED FOR LANDING ON DECK SEVEN.



EASY, LARA-- DON'T RUSH IT.

CAN IT, JESS. THIS ISN'T ANYTHING I HAVEN'T DONE A MILLION TIMES BEFORE.



WE'RE DOWN.

FINALLY! FIRST STOP, THE MESS HALL. A TUB THIS BIG HAS GOT TO HAVE REAL FOOD IN ITS LARDER.



FIRST WE THANK WHOEVER'S IN COMMAND FOR GIVING US ENOUGH FUEL TO LAND HERE. THEN WE HIT THE SHOWERS--

--BELIEVE ME, WE ALL NEED ONE.

AND YOU COULD BOTH DO WITH A SHAVE.

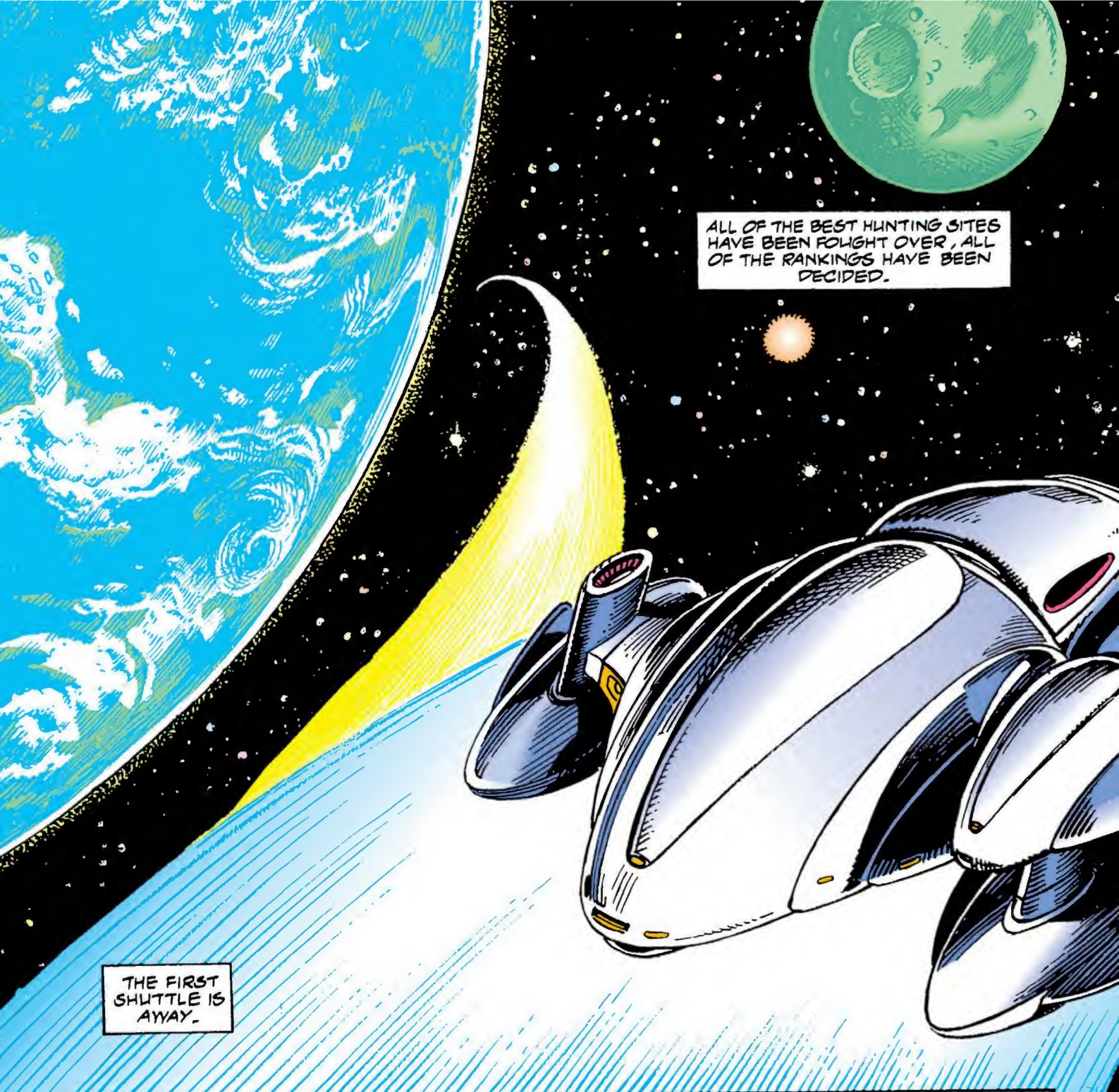
REALLY? I THOUGHT THE BEARD MADE ME LOOK MORE MANLY.



YOU DON'T NEED A BEARD FOR THAT, ELLIS. GETTING INTO THAT MAX ARMOR PROVED YOU'VE GOT WHAT IT TAKES.

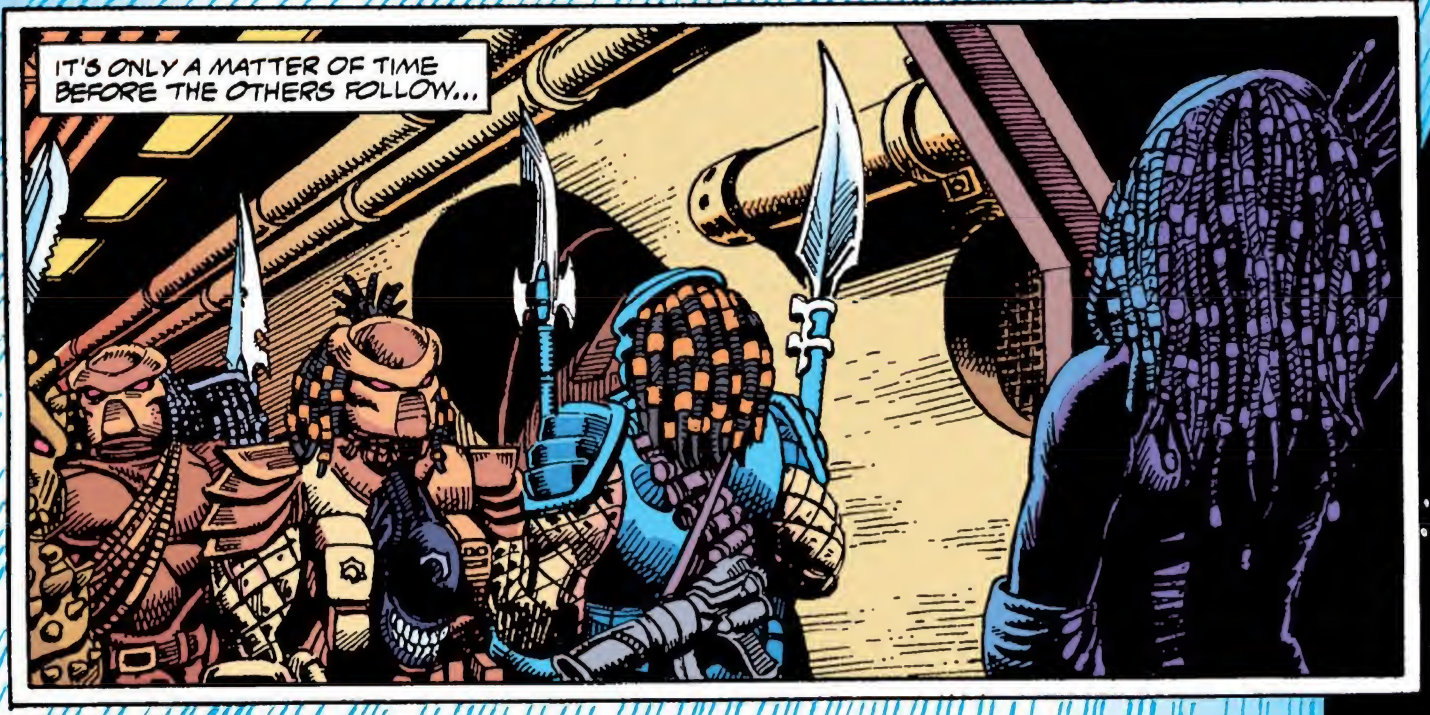
GIVE THE KID A BREAK, LARA. YOU'RE EMBARRASSING HIM.



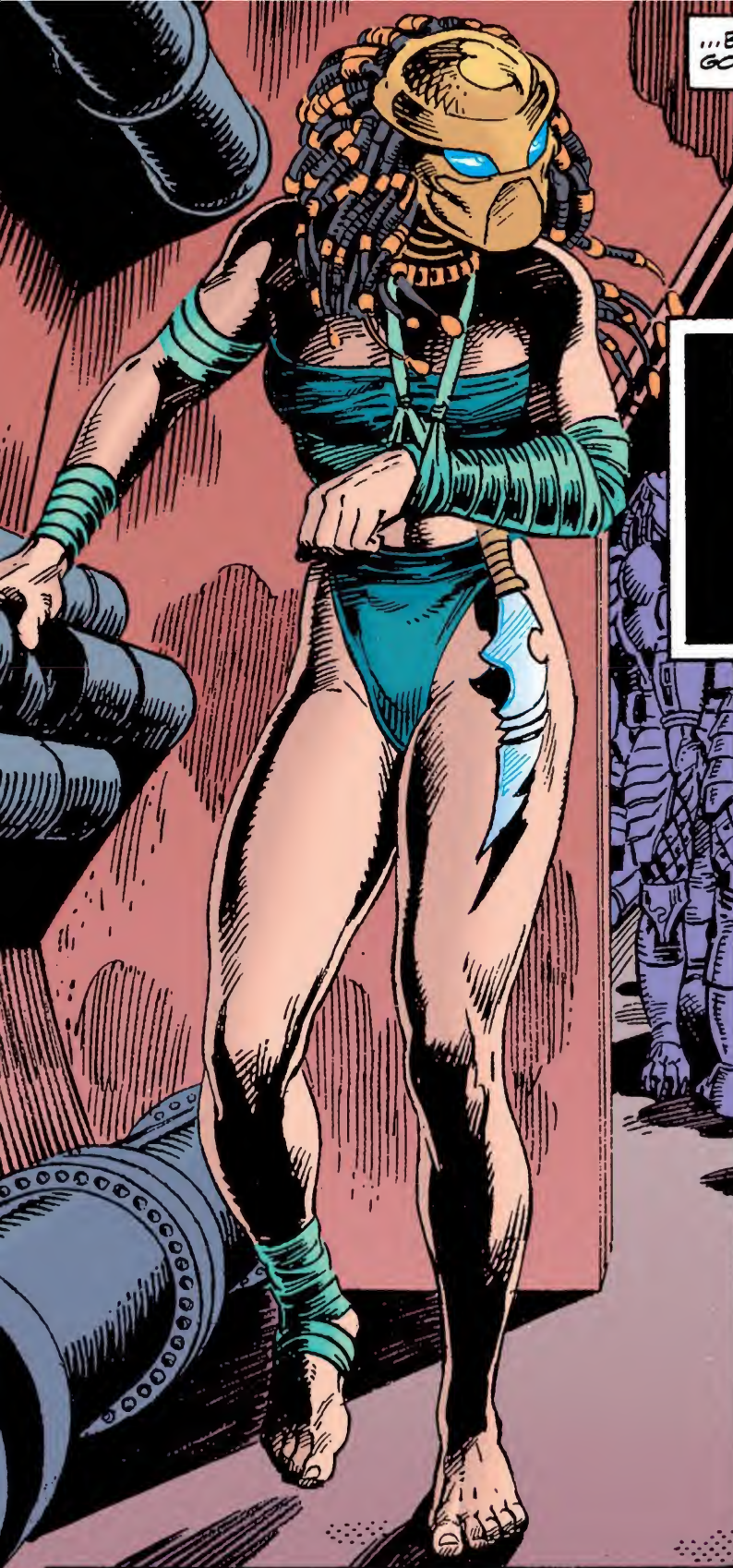


ALL OF THE BEST HUNTING SITES
HAVE BEEN FOUGHT OVER, ALL
OF THE RANKINGS HAVE BEEN
DECIDED.

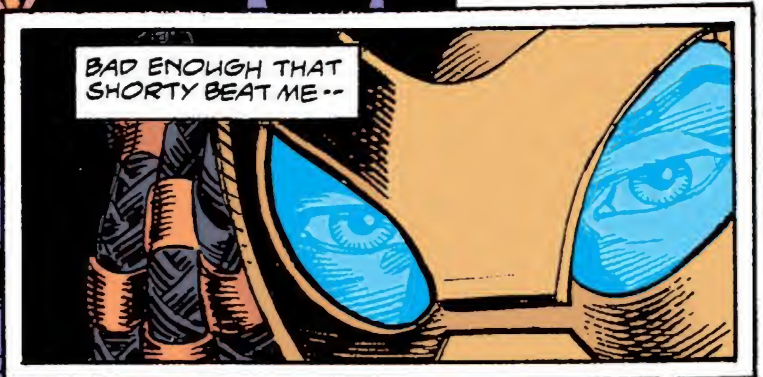
THE FIRST
SHUTTLE IS
AWAY.



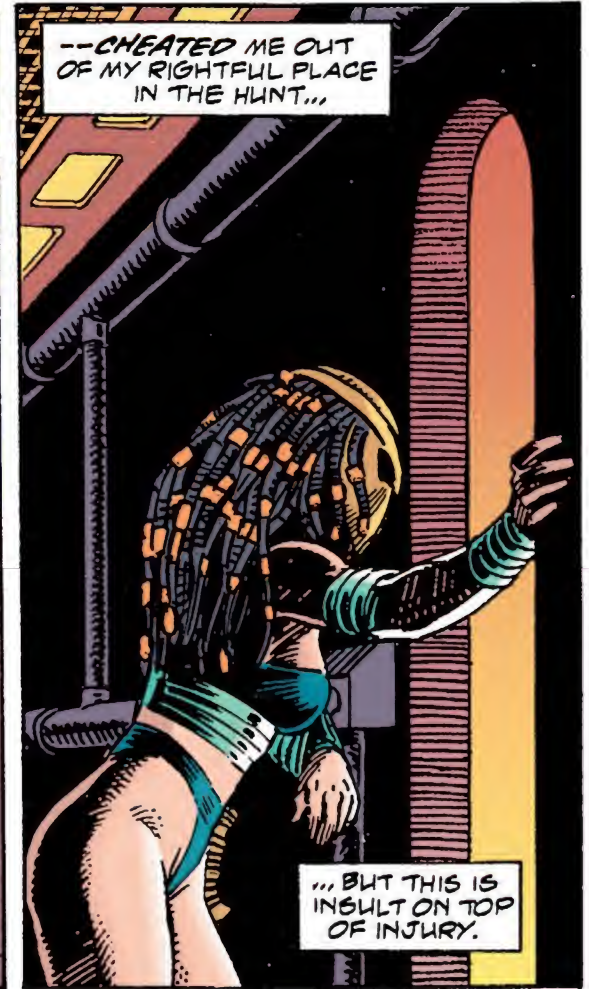
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME
BEFORE THE OTHERS FOLLOW...



...BUT I WON'T BE
GOING ANYWHERE.



BAD ENOUGH THAT
SHORTY BEAT ME--

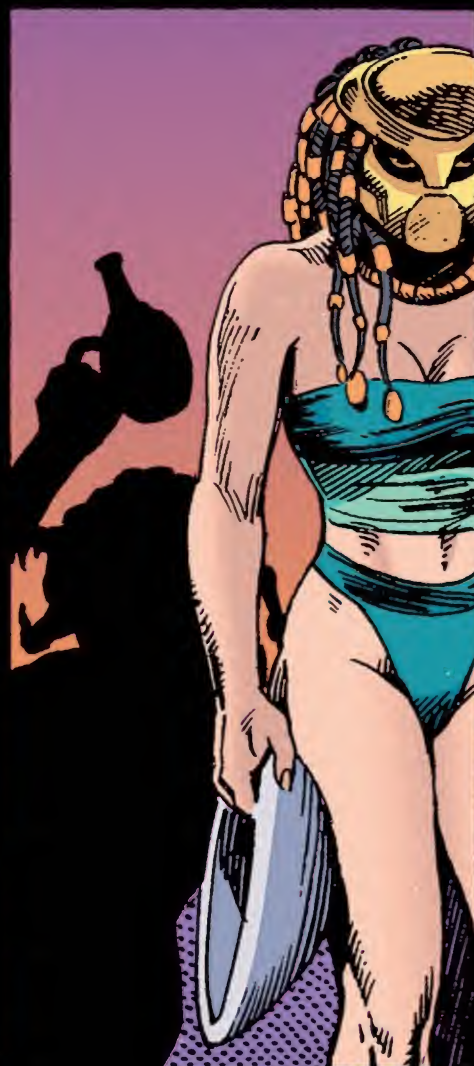


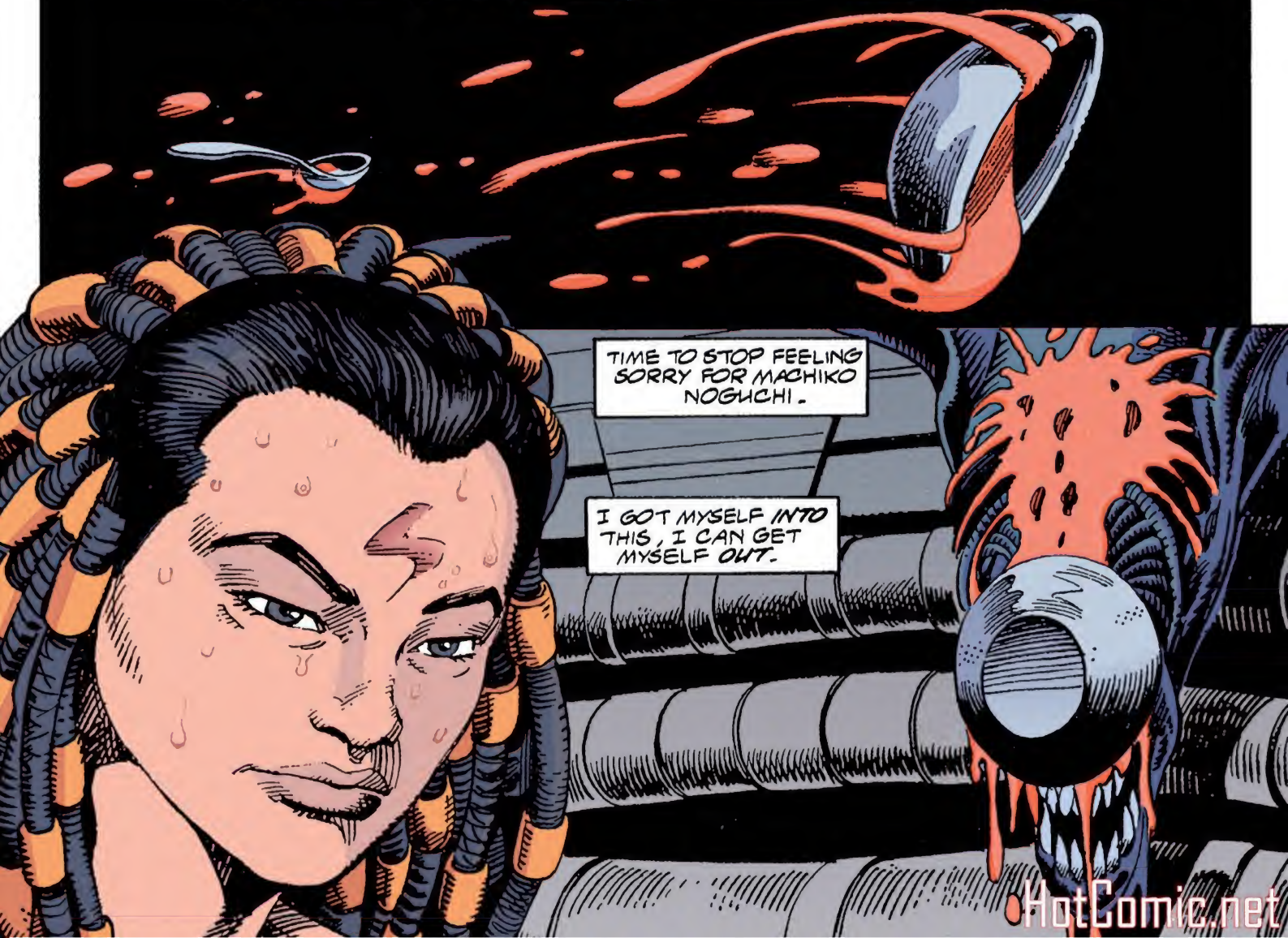
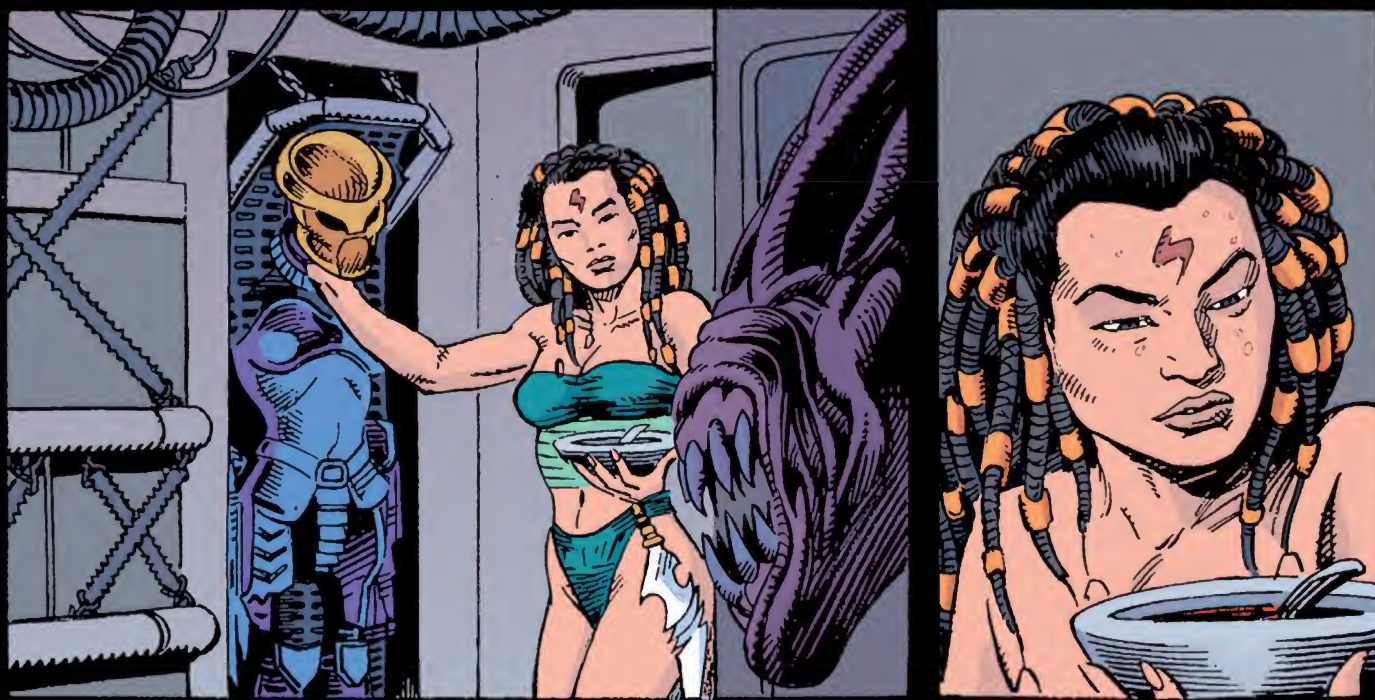
--CHEATED ME OUT
OF MY RIGHTFUL PLACE
IN THE HUNT...

...BUT THIS IS
INSULT ON TOP
OF INJURY.



THAT'S THE
HUNTER WAY.





TIME TO STOP FEELING
SORRY FOR MACHIKO
NOGUCHI.

I GOT MYSELF INTO
THIS, I CAN GET
MYSELF OUT.



STUPID
GUN--!

WAIT
= PUFF =
A SECOND,
PRATT--

GET
YOUR HAND
OFF
ME, REMBERT!

THE RADIO--?! I WAS BUSY
DUCKING! YOU FIRED FIVE
SHOTS = huff = AND DIDN'T
COME CLOSE TO HITTING
ANYTHING BUT ME!

--I DON'T
THINK = huff =
IT'S CHASING
US ANYMORE.
LISTEN...

WHAT?
WELL, WHERE
IS IT? HOW
DID IT GET
HERE?

HOW
SHOULD
I KNOW?

YEAH...
WELL I
WON'T MISS
NEXT
TIME...

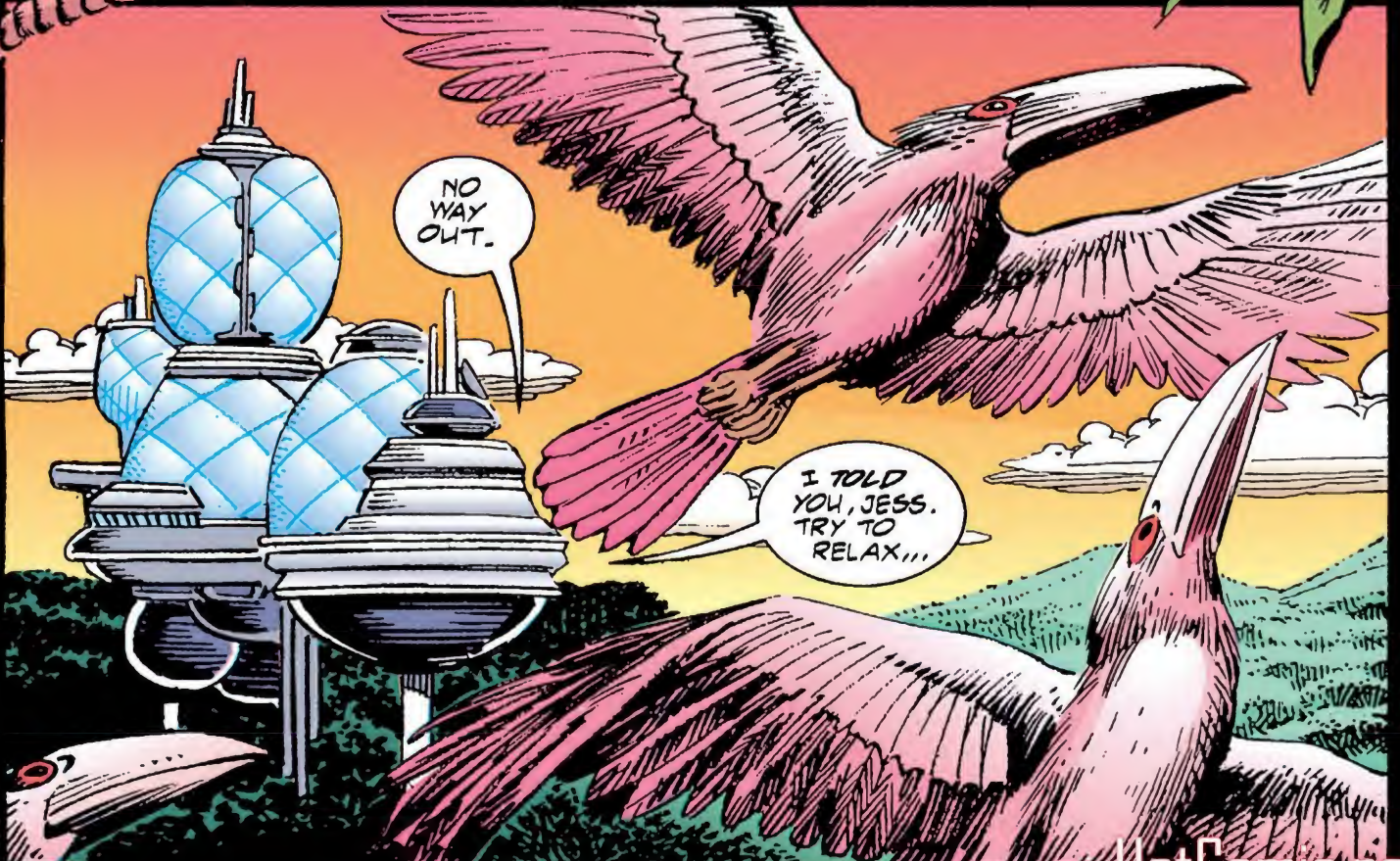
WE
COULD BE
CALLING IN
HELP RIGHT
NOW--IF YOU'D
THOUGHT TO
GRAB THE
RADIO.

CH-CHUK

CRACKS









...SAVE YOUR STRENGTH. YOU NEVER KNOW, WE MAY GET A CHANCE TO FIGHT OUR WAY CLEAR.

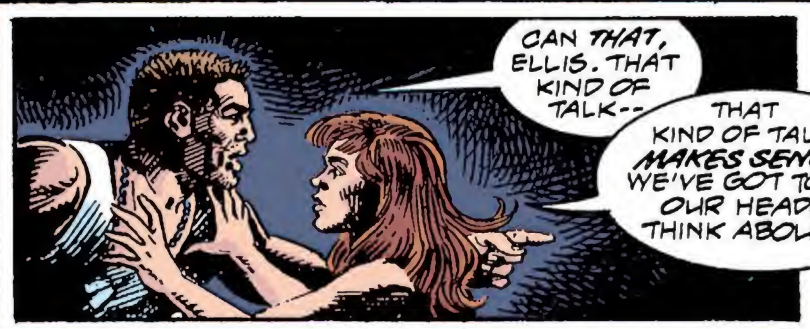
YEAH. MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT, LARA.



THEY'RE JUST A BUNCH OF CIVILIANS--

CIVILIANS ARMED WITH SCATTER GUNS.

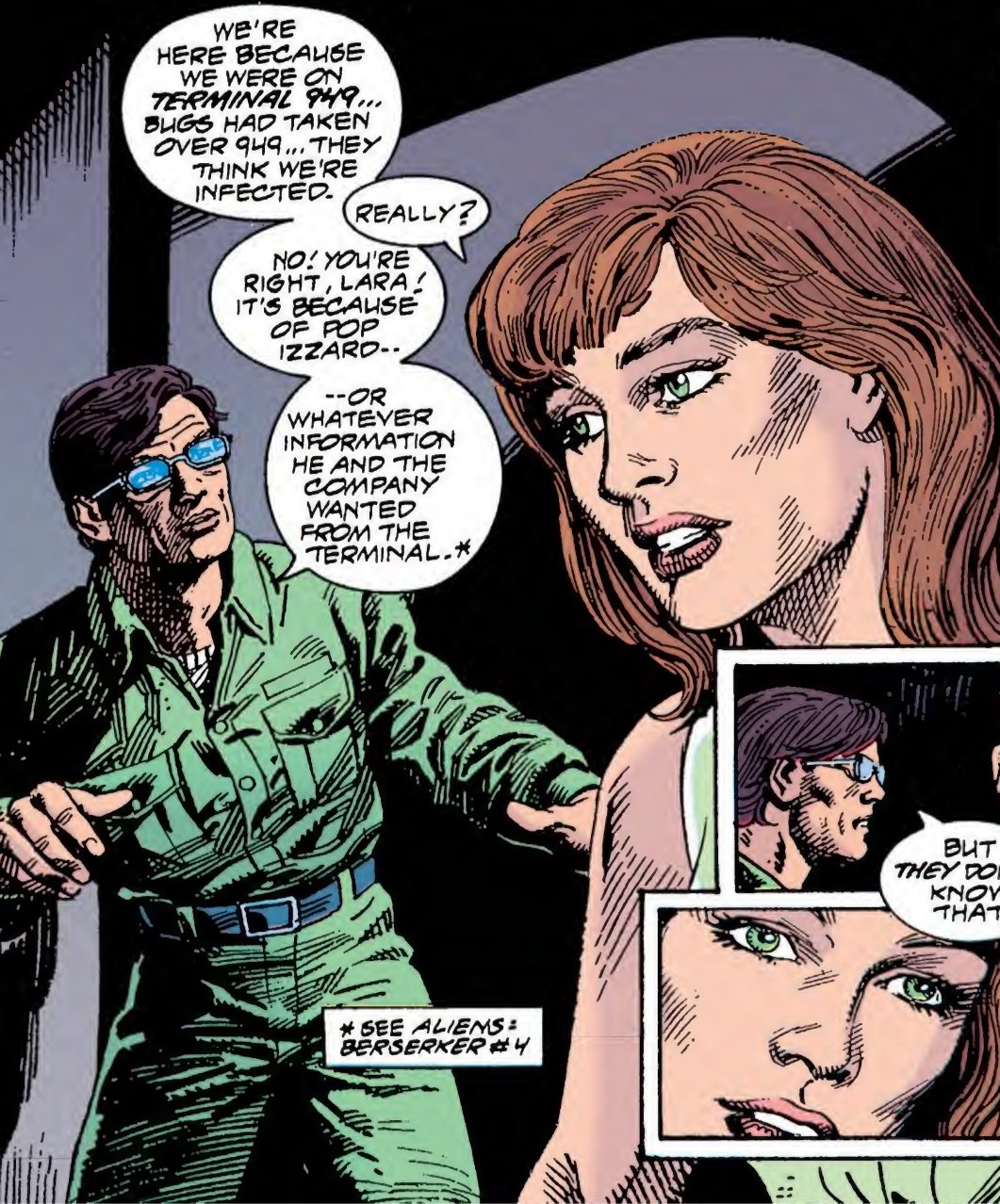
I GUARANTEE YOU, THAT GUY VINCENT IS EX-MILITARY OR EX-POLICE. HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING.



CAN THAT, ELLIS. THAT KIND OF TALK--

THAT KIND OF TALK MAKES SENSE. WE'VE GOT TO USE OUR HEADS. THINK ABOUT IT.

WHY ARE WE HERE? WHY ARE WE LOCKED UP?



WE'RE HERE BECAUSE WE WERE ON TERMINAL 949... BUGS HAD TAKEN OVER 949... THEY THINK WE'RE INFECTED.

REALLY?

NO! YOU'RE RIGHT, LARA! IT'S BECAUSE OF POP IZZARD--

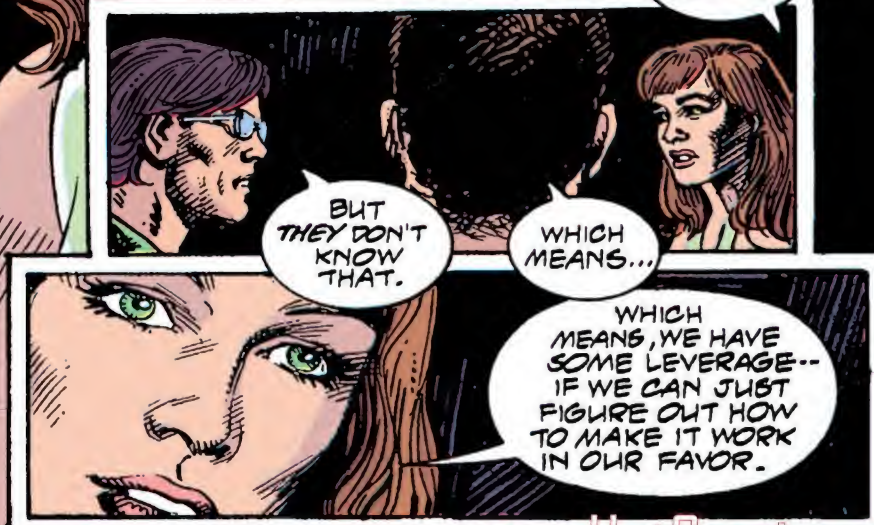
--OR WHATEVER INFORMATION HE AND THE COMPANY WANTED FROM THE TERMINAL.*

* SEE ALIENS: BERSERKER #4



SO, THEY THINK WE KNOW SOMETHING...

...WHICH WE DON'T.



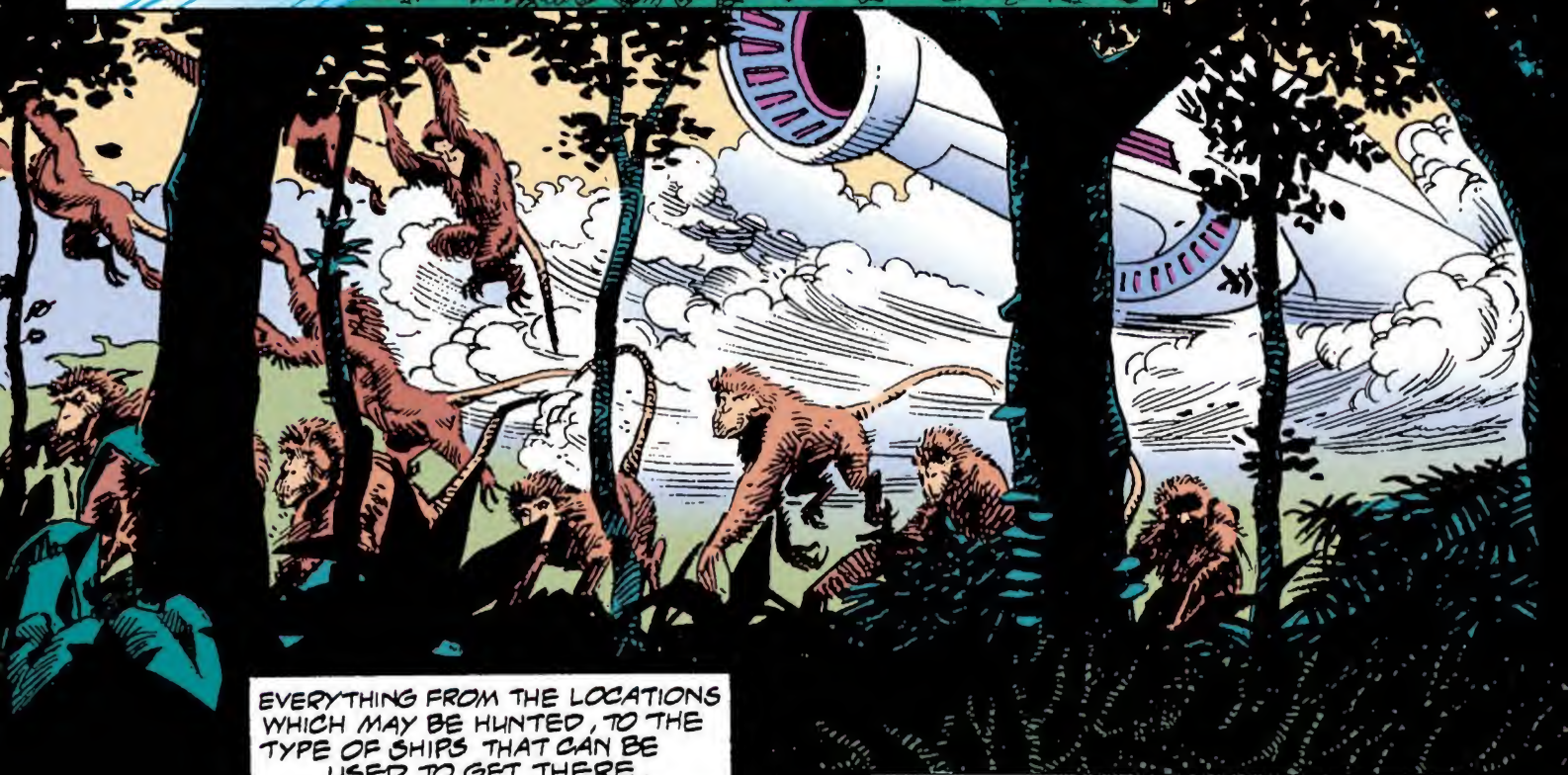
BUT THEY DON'T KNOW THAT.

WHICH MEANS...

WHICH MEANS, WE HAVE SOME LEVERAGE-- IF WE CAN JUST FIGURE OUT HOW TO MAKE IT WORK IN OUR FAVOR.



LIKE EVERY OTHER ASPECT OF THE HUNTERS' LIVES, THE HUNT FOLLOWS AN INVIOLEATE SET OF RULES.



EVERYTHING FROM THE LOCATIONS WHICH MAY BE HUNTED, TO THE TYPE OF SHIPS THAT CAN BE USED TO GET THERE.


THE REASONS FOR SOME OF THE LAWS ARE OBYIOUS, THE ORIGINS OF OTHERS ARE LOST TO ANTIQUITY. IT IS THE CLOSEST THING TO RELIGION THAT I HAVE SEEN IN HUNTER CULTURE.



A TEMPTING ANALOGY IS THAT OF A PRIEST TEACHING A GROUP OF NOVITIATES, BUT IT SIMPLIFIES THE TRUTH TOO MUCH.




NOVITIATES DON'T RISK DEATH FOR FAILING TO LEARN THEIR LESSONS.




STILL, AS I LEARNED MYSELF,
NOTHING MATCHES THE THRILL
OF RISKING EVERYTHING
AGAINST SUCCESS.




ESPECIALLY AGAINST
AN ADVERSARY AS
RESOURCEFUL AND
AS ADAPTIVE AS
THE BUGS.



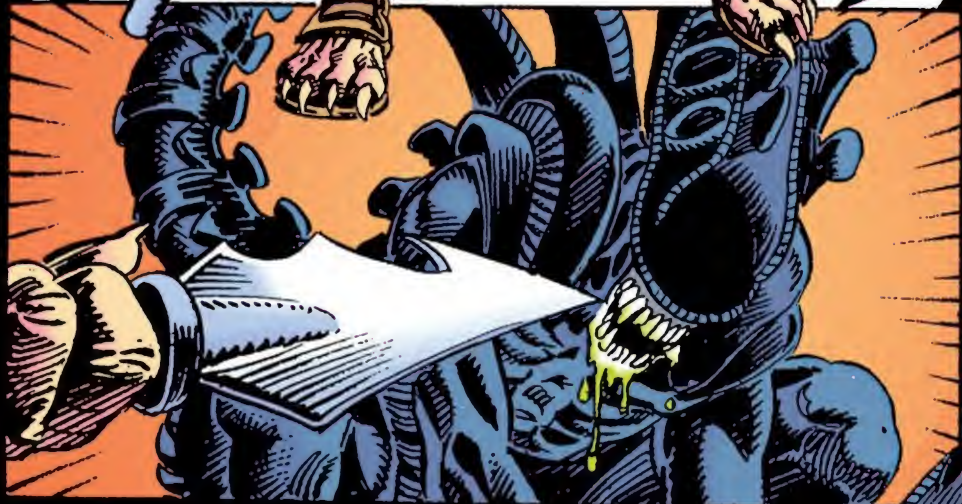
ON EARTH, PEOPLE PAY SMALL
FORTUNES TO ARTIFICIALLY
EXPERIENCE A TASTE OF
THE HYPERAWARENESS AND
THE ADRENAUNE-HIGH THAT
COMES FROM PUTTING ONE'S
LIFE ON THE LINE.

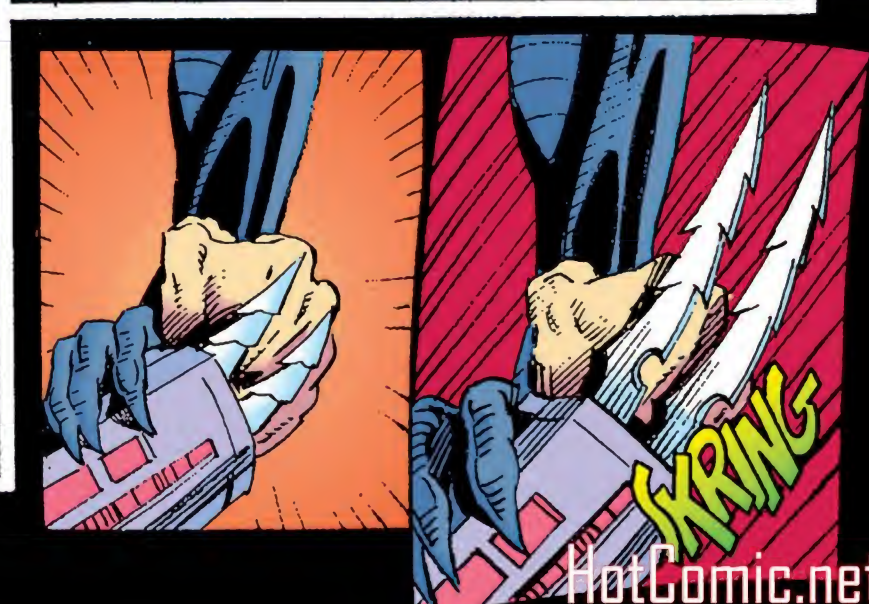
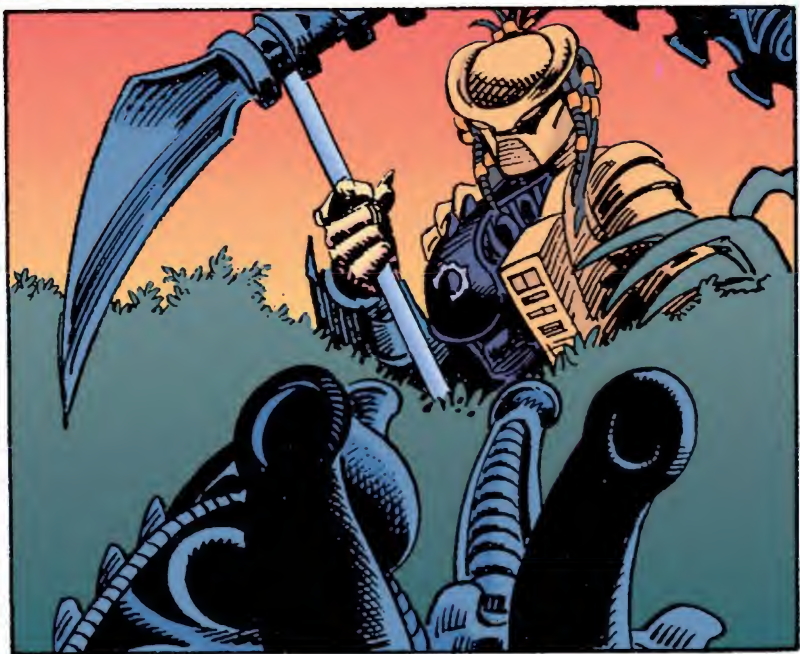


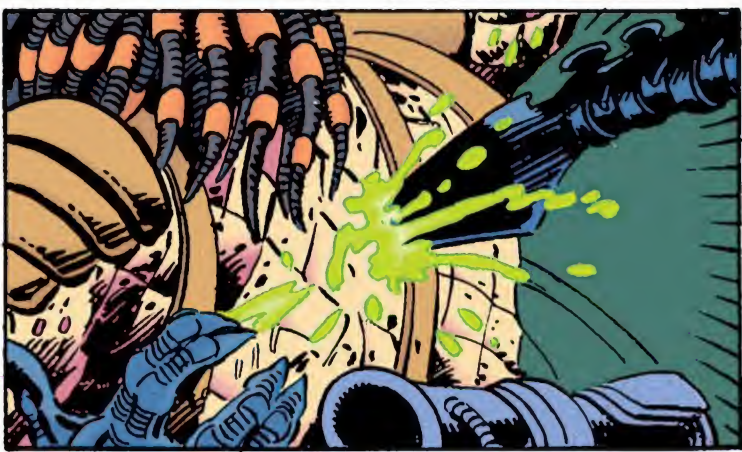
ALL IT IS,
THOUGH,
IS A TASTE.



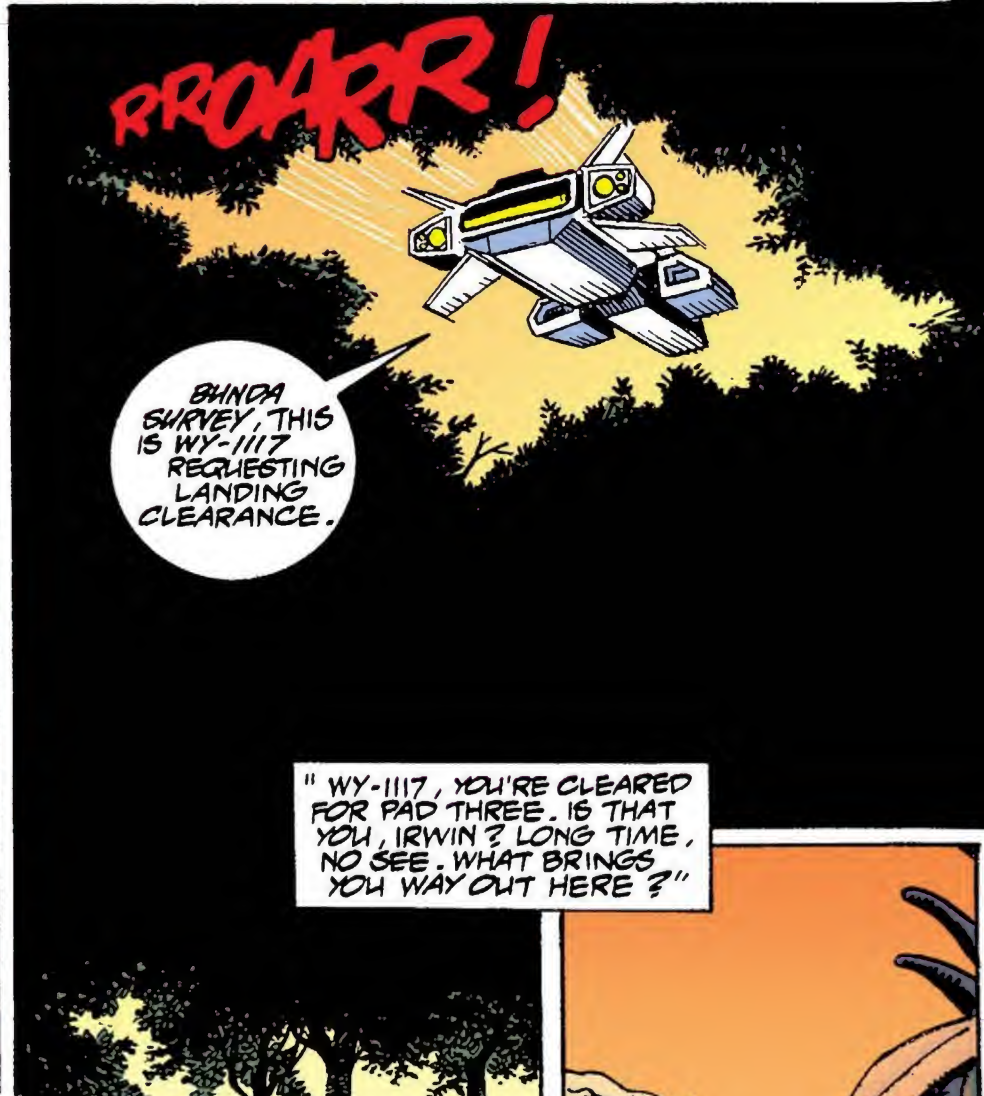
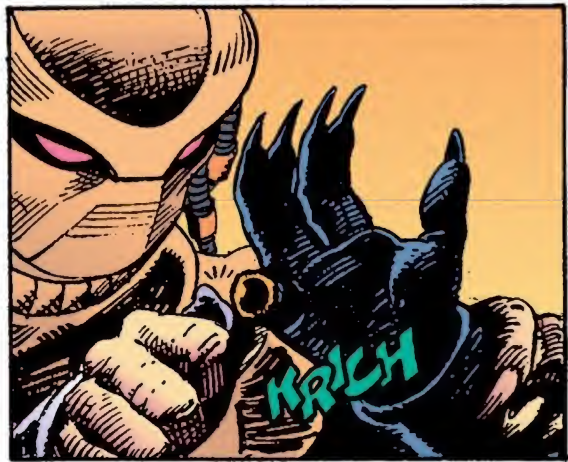
THE REAL THING
COMES WITH A
MUCH HIGHER
PRICE.







SHLOCH



RRROARR!

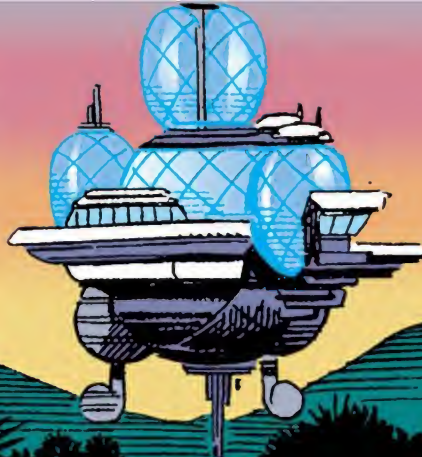
BYNDA
SURVEY, THIS
IS WY-1117
REQUESTING
LANDING
CLEARANCE.

" WY-1117, YOU'RE CLEARED
FOR PAD THREE. IS THAT
YOU, IRWIN? LONG TIME,
NO SEE. WHAT BRINGS
YOU WAY OUT HERE ?"

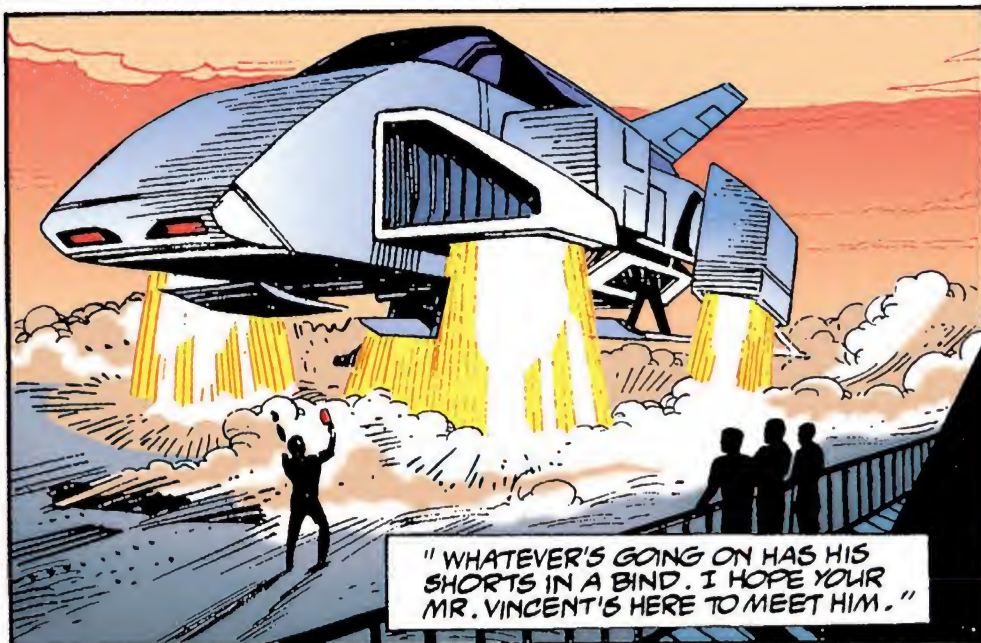




PLAYING
CHAUFFEUR
TO COMPANY
BIG SHOTS
AS USUAL,
WINDY.



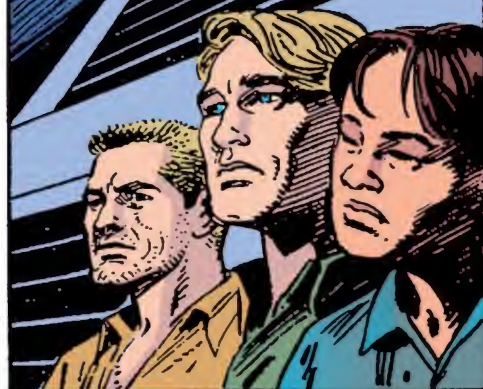
SPEAKING OF
WHICH, THIS GUY BRIGGS
HAS A MAJOR HAIR OUT OF
PLACE. HE'S BEEN AFTER
ME TO BEND THE LAWS OF
PHYSICS EVER SINCE
WE LEFT "ZEN'S
RESPITE."



"WHATEVER'S GOING ON HAS HIS
SHORTS IN A BIND. I HOPE YOUR
MR. VINCENT'S HERE TO MEET HIM."

"VINCENT'S ON THE PAD,
IRWIN. MEET YOU ON THE
CONTROL DECK?"

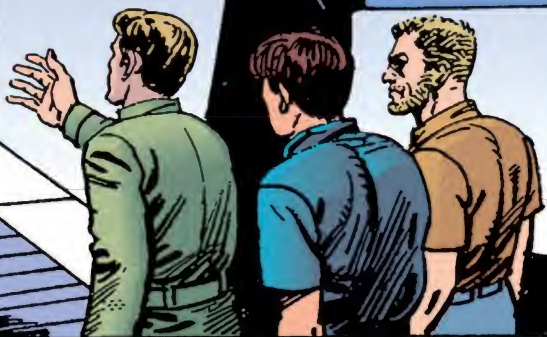
"YOU GOT IT,
WINDY."



WELCOME
TO BLINDA,
MR. BRIGGS.

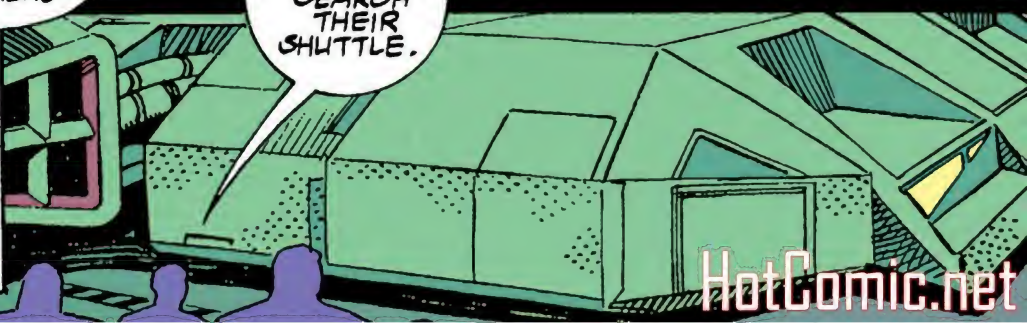
WOW,
IS THAT A
SUN
JUMPER--?

SAVE THE
PLEASANTRIES,
VINCENT.



I'LL
INTERVIEW
OUR THREE
PRISONERS--

--AFTER
MY MEN
SEARCH
THEIR
SHUTTLE.





(NAME) LARA, KATHERINE I.
(F - 28 YEARS E.S.)

(PROFILE) HONORABLE
DISCHARGE USCMC
(LIEUTENANT)

B-LEVEL TRAINING IN
COMMUNICATIONS AND
ELECTRONICS.

C-LEVEL TRAINING IN
ASTRAL-NAVIGATION.

(CURRENT ASSIGNMENT)
W-Y49392 (NEMESIS)

(SECURITY CLEARANCE) C2



(NAME) JESS, MARTIN A.
(M - 30 YEARS E.S.)

(PROFILE) DISHONORABLE
DISCHARGE USCMC (PFC).

NO TRAINING HIGHER THAN
D-LEVEL

(CURRENT ASSIGNMENT)
W-Y49392 (NEMESIS)

(SECURITY CLEARANCE)
D7 - POSSIBLE SECURITY
RISK



(NAME) ELUS, BRIAN K.
(M - 24 YEARS E.S.)

(PROFILE) TECH-I, A-LEVEL
TRAINING IN ROBOTICS,
ELECTRONICS, SYNTHETIC
REPAIR.

(CURRENT ASSIGNMENT)
W-Y49392 (NEMESIS)

(SECURITY CLEARANCE) C2

MY NAME
IS BRIGGS. THE
COMPANY HAS
AUTHORIZED ME
TO MAKE YOU
AN OFFER.

AS SOLE
SURVIVORS OF THE
NEMESIS, THE THREE
OF YOU WILL BE
ALLOWED TO SPLIT
THE ENTIRE CREW'S
BONUS FROM THAT
JOB--

-- PROVIDED
YOU TURN OVER
THE DATA
RECOVERED FROM
TERMINAL 949'S
COMPUTER.

ALL WE
WANT IS SAFE
PASSAGE
BACK TO--

CERTAINLY,
WHATEVER YOU
WANT, MS. LARA.
JUST TELL ME
WHERE THAT
DATA IS.

HOW DO
WE KNOW
YOU'LL LIVE UP
TO YOUR END OF
THE AGREEMENT,
BRIGGS?

THE
COMPANY'S
BEEN KNIFING US
IN THE BACK
EVERY TIME WE
TURN AROU--

NOT TO MENTION
ALL OF THOSE
PEOPLE ON
949.

JESS!

NO, LARA,
I'M OUT. HE'S
ASKING US
TO JUST
FORGET ABOUT
TEAPE, PULASKI,
AND THAT
POOR BASTARD
IN THE MAX-X

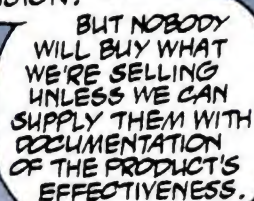
*MOBILE ASSAULT EXO-WARRIOR.



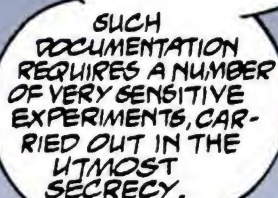
SURELY YOU UNDER-
STAND HOW IMPOR-
TANT IT IS FOR
THE COMPANY
TO MAINTAIN
ITS EDGE
OVER THE
COMPETITION.



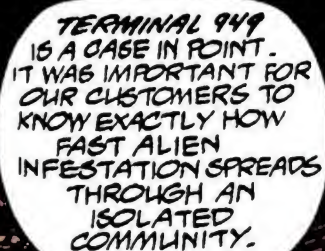
THE
ALIEN
AND ITS
POTENTIAL
APPLICATIONS,
ARE IMPORTANT
TO OUR MILITARY
DIVISION.



BUT NOBODY
WILL BUY WHAT
WE'RE SELLING
UNLESS WE CAN
SUPPLY THEM WITH
DOCUMENTATION
OF THE PRODUCT'S
EFFECTIVENESS.



SUCH
DOCUMENTATION
REQUIRES A NUMBER
OF VERY SENSITIVE
EXPERIMENTS, CAR-
RIED OUT IN THE
UTMOST
SECURITY.



TERMINAL 949
IS A CASE IN POINT.
IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR
OUR CUSTOMERS TO
KNOW EXACTLY HOW
FAST ALIEN
INFESTATION SPREADS
THROUGH AN
ISOLATED
COMMUNITY.



WHAT?



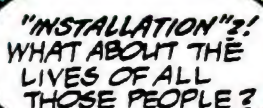
BUT-- 949
HAD OVER 400
PEOPLE ON
BOARD!



BELIEVE ME, USING
949 WAS NOT A
DECISION THAT WAS
MADE LIGHTLY.



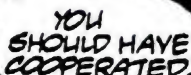
THE
COMPANY HAD
SEVERAL BILLION
DOLLARS INVESTED
IN THAT
INSTALLATION.



"INSTALLATION"?!
WHAT ABOUT THE
LIVES OF ALL
THOSE PEOPLE?



I WAS
AFRAID IT
MIGHT COME TO
THIS. KEENE,
NIRASAWA.



YOU
SHOULD HAVE
COOPERATED.

"WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
WILL BE VERY UNPLEASANT."

"...PRETTY ROUTINE,
THE ONLY EXCITEMENT
WE'VE HAD AROUND
HERE, AND, IN FACT,
IT HAPPENED
TODAY--"



KAKLANK

"--IS TWO OF OUR
SURVEYORS FAILED
TO RETURN ON
SCHEDULE. PROBABLY
TURN UP DRUNK
TOMORRO--"

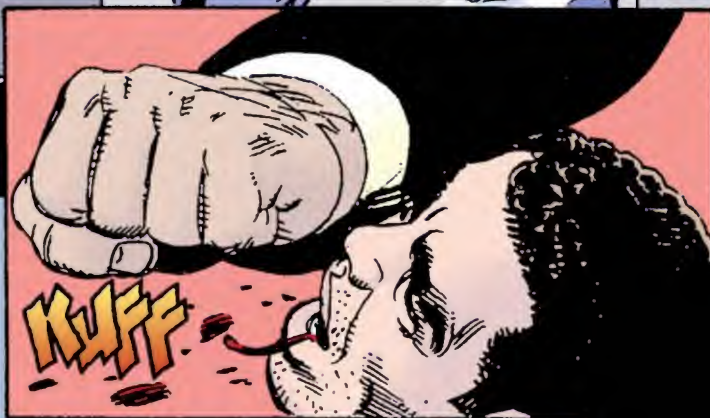
--WH,
WHAT WAS
THAT?

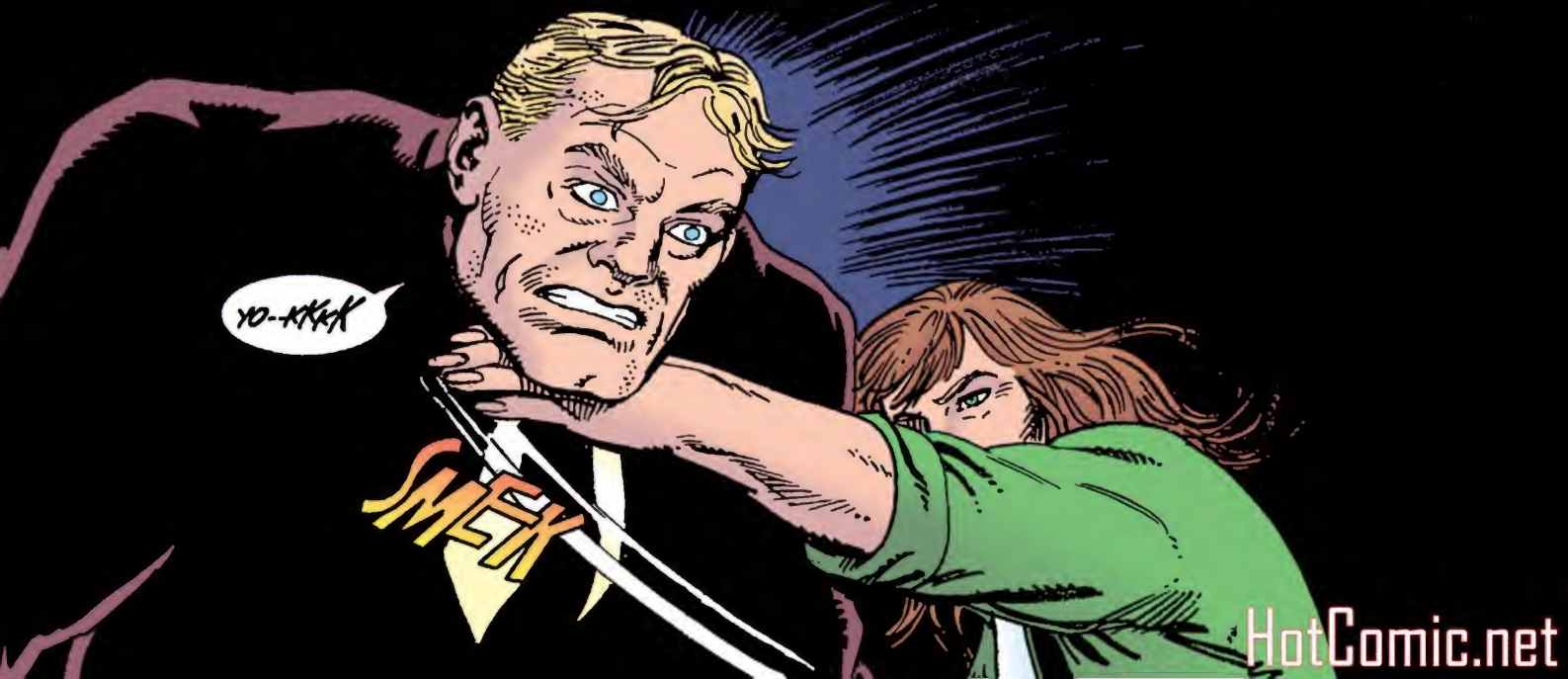
SOUNDED
LIKE IT CAME
FROM OUTSIDE.
MAYBE THE
PLATFORM'S
SCRAPING THE
TREETOPS...

ON A
CALM NIGHT
LIKE THIS?
IMPOSSIBLE. THE
NAV-COMPUTERS
WOULD AUTO-
MATICALLY--

HEY,
WHAT'S
THIS?









Y-YOU
KILLED
HIM!

BUT,
HOW--?



OH,
YEAH. I
FORGOT.

TRAINING.
I USED TO
BE A
MARINE.

SO DID
HE. COME ON,
HELP ME--



I
LOOK UPON
YOU WITH
NEW EYES,
LARA.

YEAH,
WELL I WAS
GETTING TIRED OF
WAITING FOR YOU
TO MAKE YOUR
MOVE. SO NOW
WHAT?

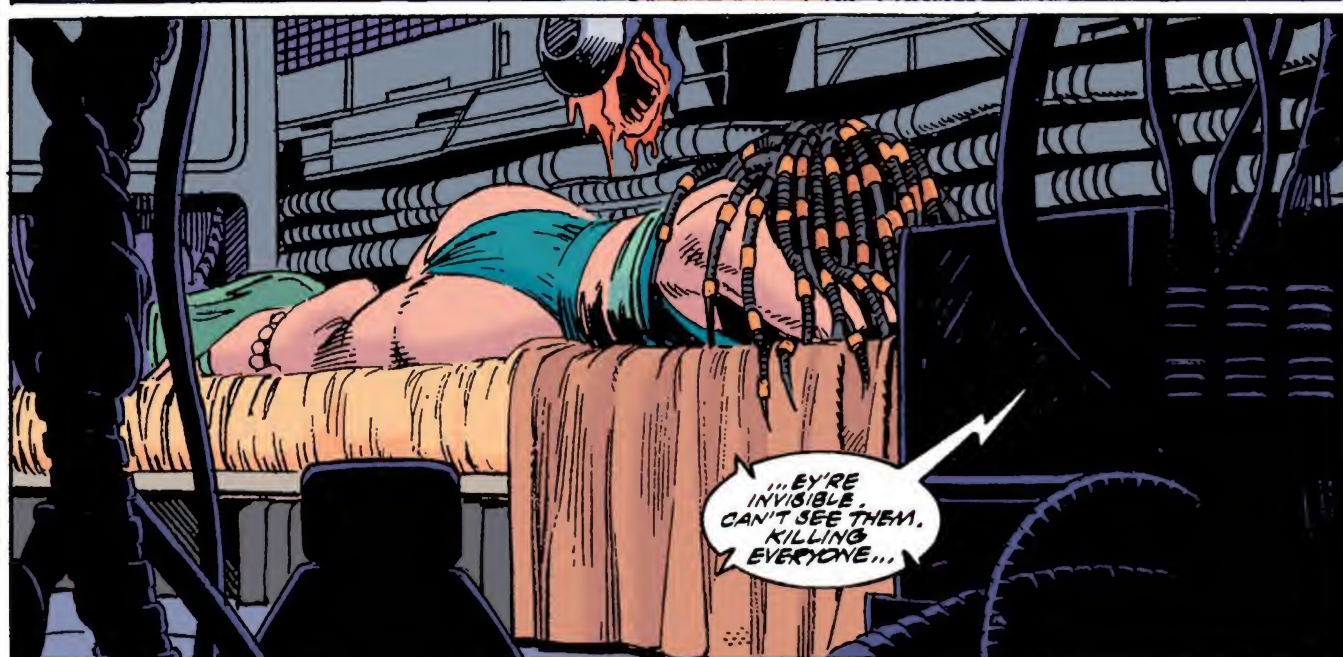



YOU
HAVE TO ASK?
WE REV UP THE
ENGINES ON THIS
THING AND BLAST
THE HELL OUT
OF HERE.

NO GOOD.
WE WERE
RUNNING ON
FUMES WHEN
WE LANDED.




COME
ON, ELLIS.
REFUELING
TAKES
TWO.







SURE,
IT'S
CRAZY.



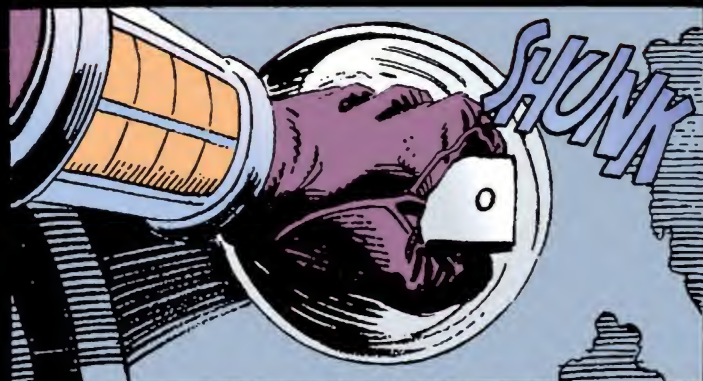
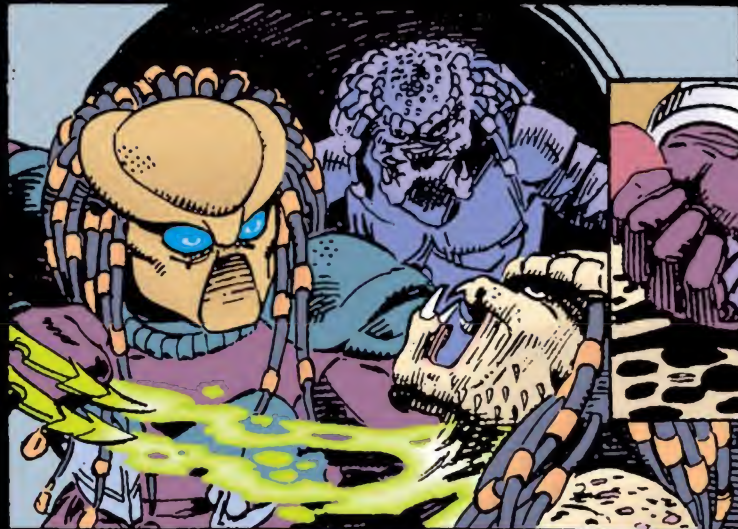
BUT WHAT
CHOICE DO
I HAVE?



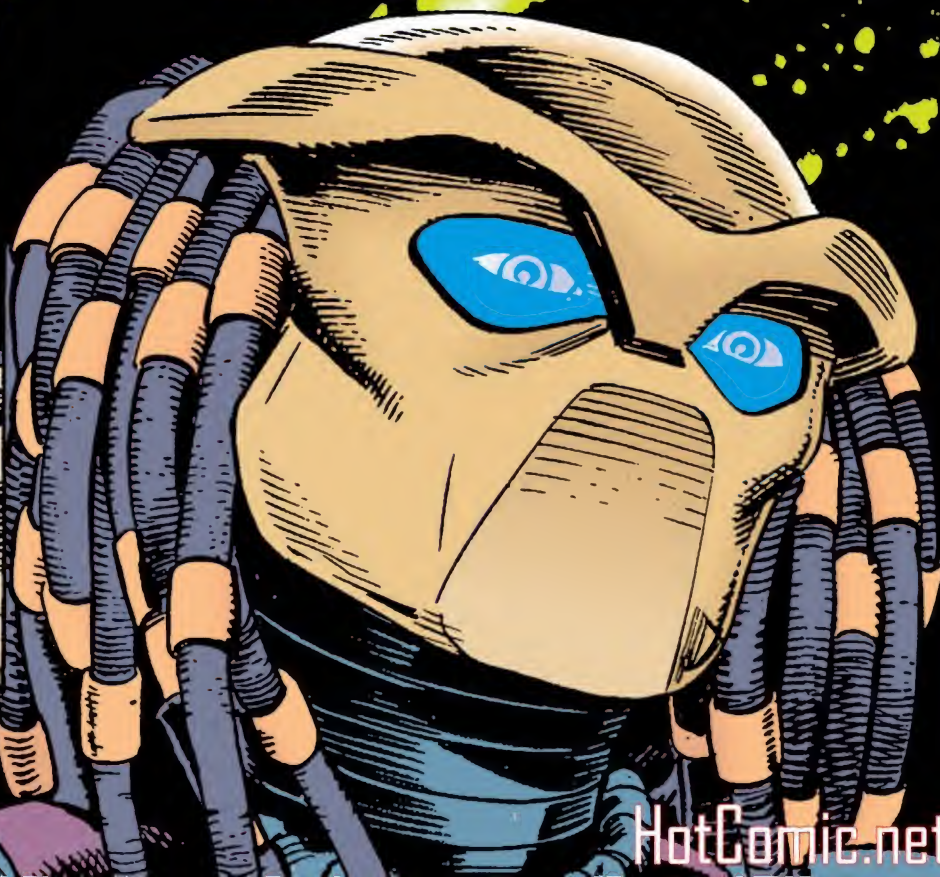
EVEN THOUGH I'M
WITH THE HUNTERS,
I'M STILL *HUMAN*.



I CAN'T STAND BY
AND DO NOTHING.



ANYWAY, THERE'S
NO TURNING BACK
NOW.





SO, NOW I KNOW WHAT
IT FEELS LIKE TO BE
AN OUTCAST FROM
TWO WORLDS.

I KNOW WHAT MY PARENTS
WOULD SAY--"OH, MACHIKO
WAS ALWAYS A LONER, BUT
IT WAS ONLY BECAUSE SHE
WANTED TO BE THE BEST AT
EVERYTHING." THEY WERE
ALWAYS MAKING EXCUSES
FOR ME.

OTHER PEOPLE WOULD BE
MORE HONEST -- "NOGUCHI?
ANY TIME SHE CAN'T HAVE
HER WAY, SHE WANTS TO
CHANGE THE RULES."

**BANG
BANG
BANG**

MY CURRENT COMPANIONS...
WELL, THEY'D BE LESS
CHARITABLE STILL. GOOD
THING THE SHIP ONLY
HAS A SKELETON
CREW.

THEY'VE BEEN ROUNDED ON THE HATCH LIKE DEMON DRUMMERS EVER SINCE THEY DISCOVERED I KILLED THE 'CAPTAIN.'

BANG

BANG BANG

BUT WHAT ALTERNATIVE DID I HAVE ? THERE ARE HUMAN LIVES AT STAKE, AND WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO A CHOICE...

...MY ALLEGIANCE STILL LIES WITH MY OWN SPECIES.

WON'T BE LONG BEFORE ONE OF THE CREW THINKS TO GO FOR CUTTING EQUIPMENT. I NEED SOME KIND OF DIVERSION.

CLICK

I HOPE THE COMPUTER CAN UNDERSTAND MY SCRIBBLING. THE HUNTERS' COMPUTER SYSTEM IS ALL IMAGE-BASED. SIMPLE, REALLY...

...IF YOU CAN ACCESS THE RIGHT AREA AND CONNECT STEPS IN THE CORRECT ORDER.

TOPKNOT IS GOING TO REGRET
SHOWING ME HOW TO USE THE
SYSTEM.

CHIK

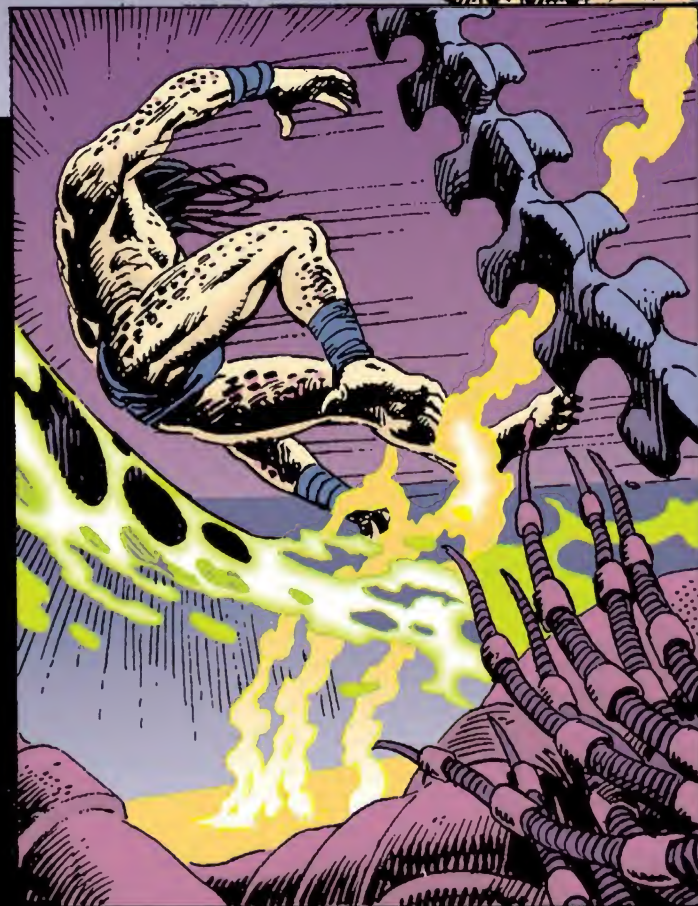
VRRR

CLIK CLANK

SNAP

CHAK



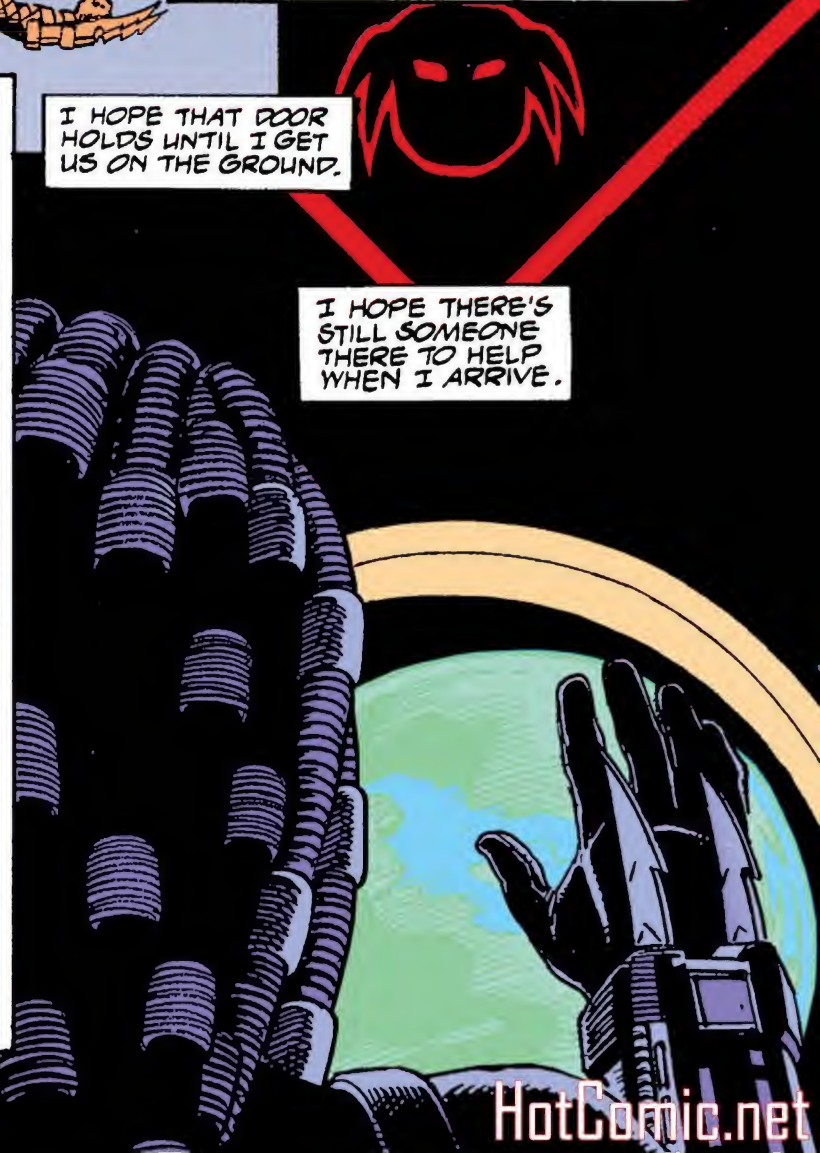




THAT TOOK LESS TIME
THAN I EXPECTED.

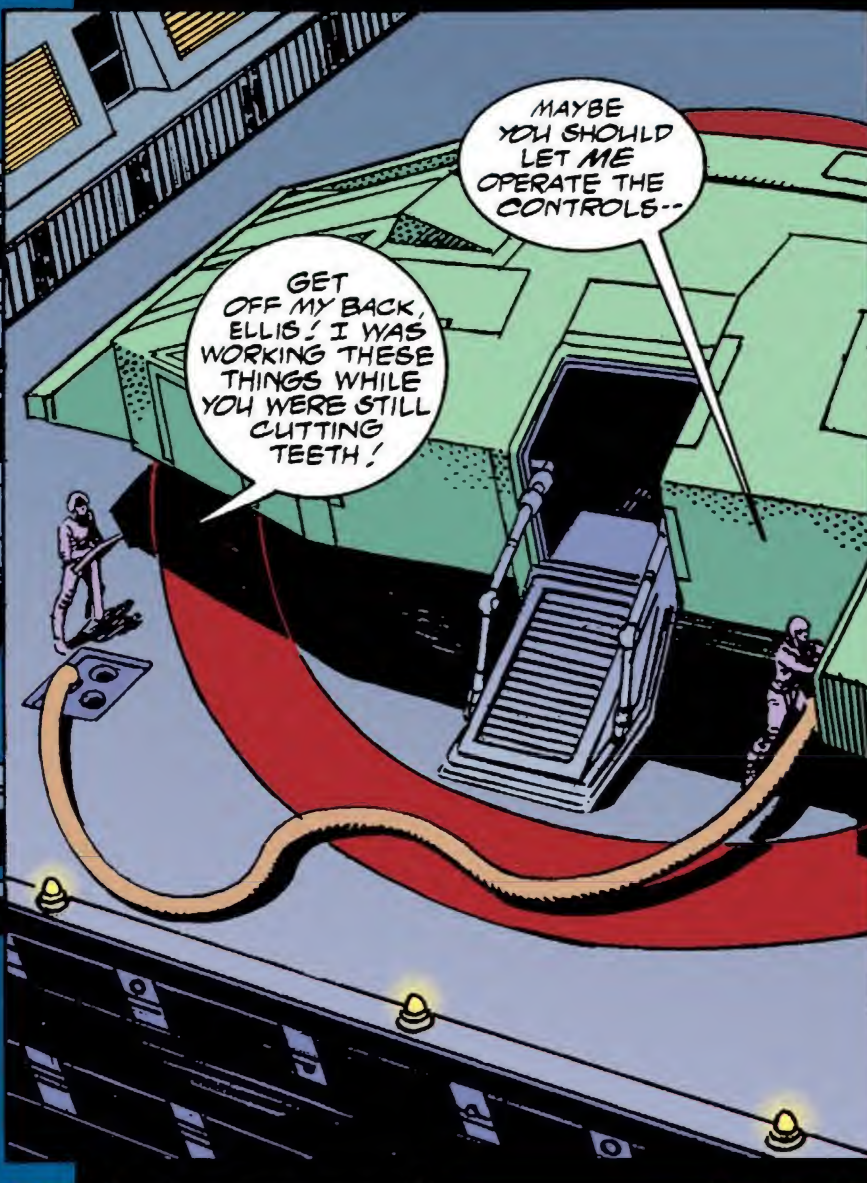
I HOPE THAT DOOR
HOLDS UNTIL I GET
US ON THE GROUND.

I HOPE THERE'S
STILL SOMEONE
THERE TO HELP
WHEN I ARRIVE.





HURRY,
JESS, THE
PLATFORM'S
REALLY
STARTING
TO TILT!



GET
OFF MY BACK,
ELLIS! I WAS
WORKING THESE
THINGS WHILE
YOU WERE STILL
CUTTING
TEETH!

MAYBE
YOU SHOULD
LET ME
OPERATE THE
CONTROLS--



WHAT'S THE HOLDUP?
I'M FINISHED WITH THE
PRELAUNCH-- WE CAN
GO AS SOON AS YOU
LOAD SOME FUEL
INTO THIS THING!

I
TRIED TO
TELL HIM,
LARA...



BRIGGS
COULD COME
BACK ANY
SECOND!

YEAH?
I DON'T
KNOW WHAT
YOU'RE
WORRIED
ABOUT--

--AFTER
THE WAY
YOU TOOK
OUT HIS
MAN
KEENE.

NOW,
LET ME
WORK...



LESSEE...
FLOW RATE...
SET TO MAX.
FILTERS...
SET. MIXTURE...
SET.



DONE!
FILL 'ER
UP, ELLIS!

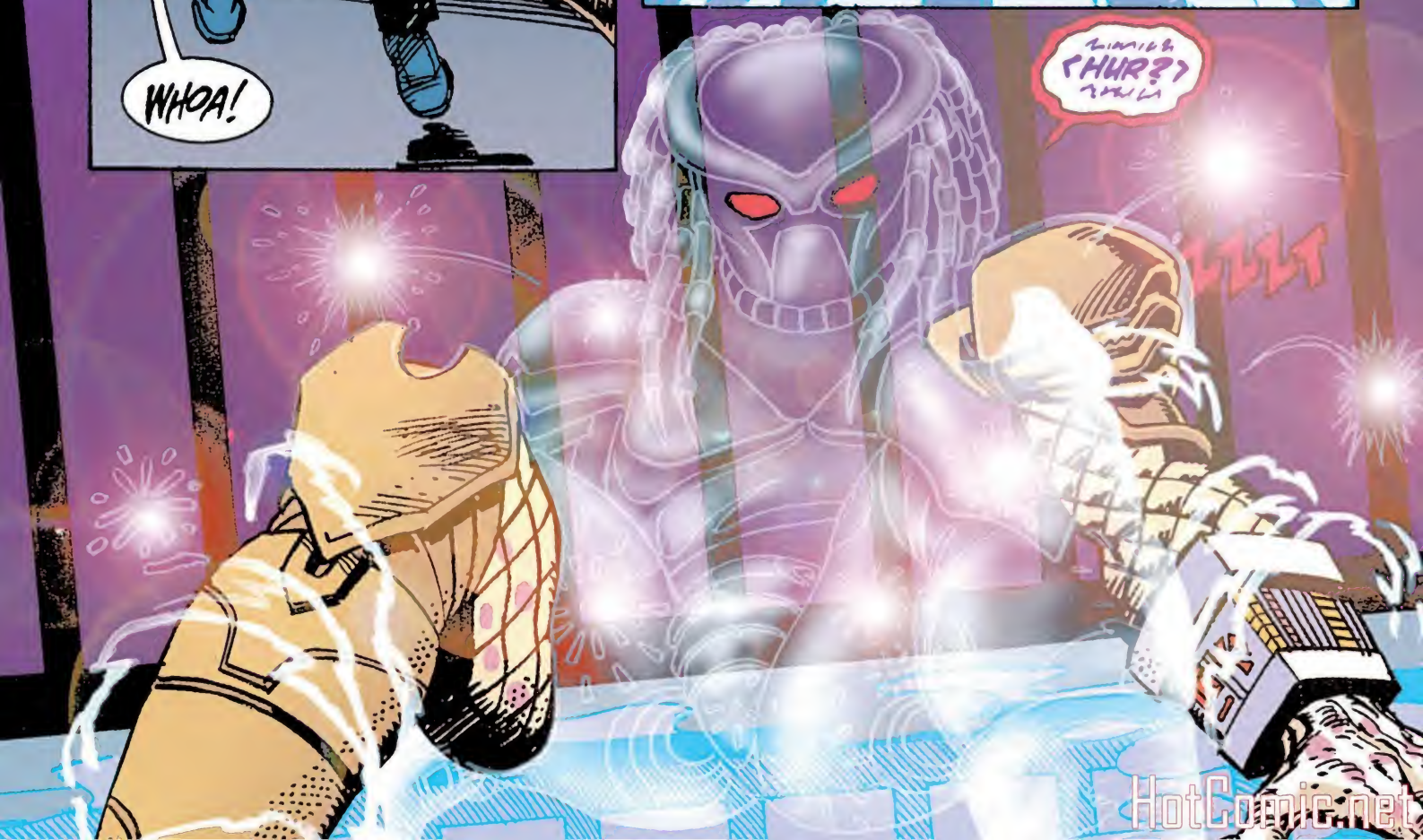
ABOUT
TIME... huh?
WHAT THE
HELL IS
THAT?



JESS!
LOOK
OUT!



WHA--?
UGHN!



BA-BOOM

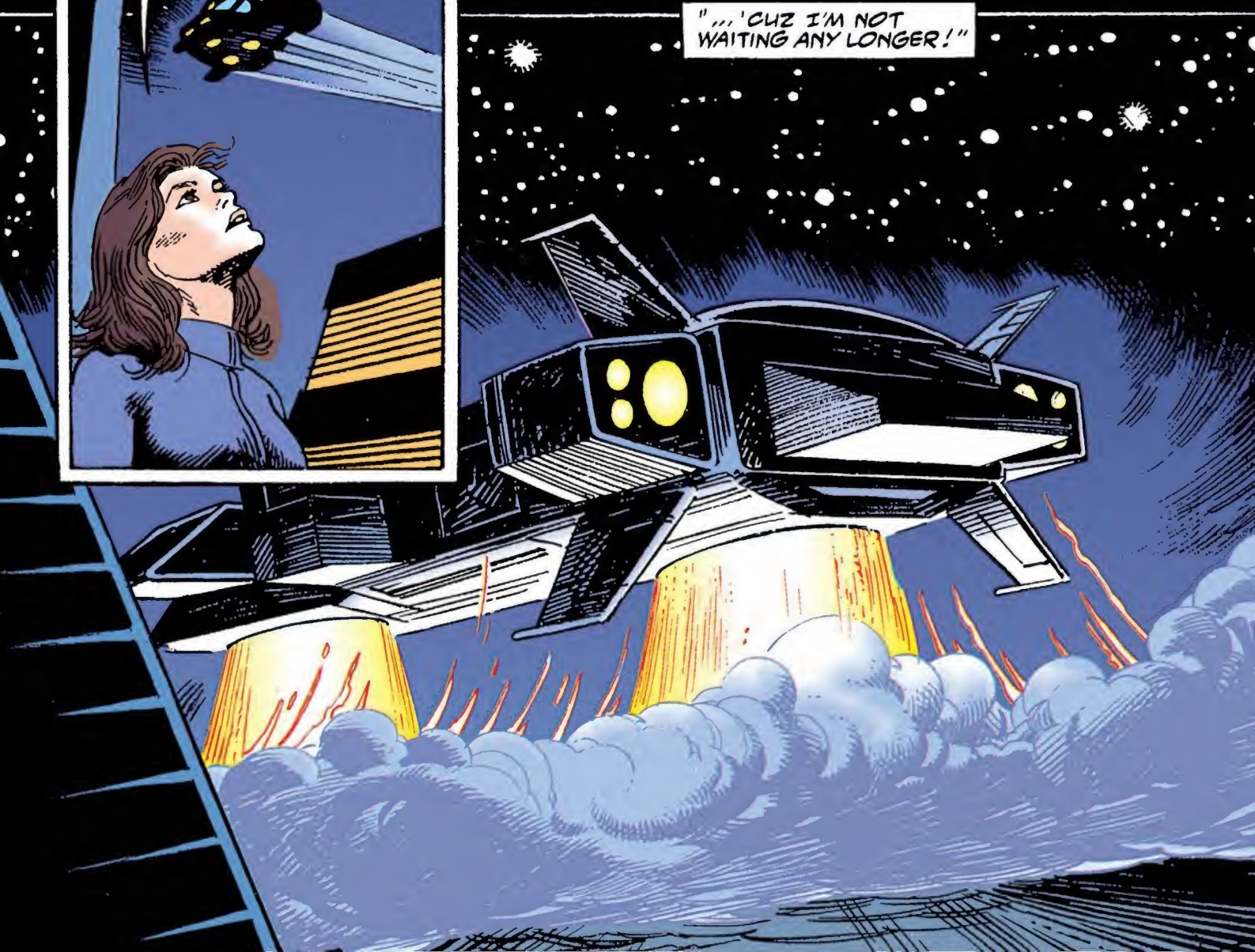
WHAT WAS THAT?

THE WHOLE PLATFORM'S GONNA GO!

THEN LET'S GET GONE!

I HOPE MR. BRIGGS IS ON ONE OF THOSE 'COPTERS'...

"... 'CUZ I'M NOT WAITING ANY LONGER!"





I-I DON'T KNOW.

NIRASAWA, THE PLATFORM IS UNDER ATTACK BY PERSON--OR PERSONS--UNKNOWN. GET ME BACK TO THE NEMESIS SHUTTLE BY THE FASTEST POSSIBLE ROUTE.

YES, MR. BRIGGS.

THE WHOLE PLATFORM'S GOING TO CRASH.

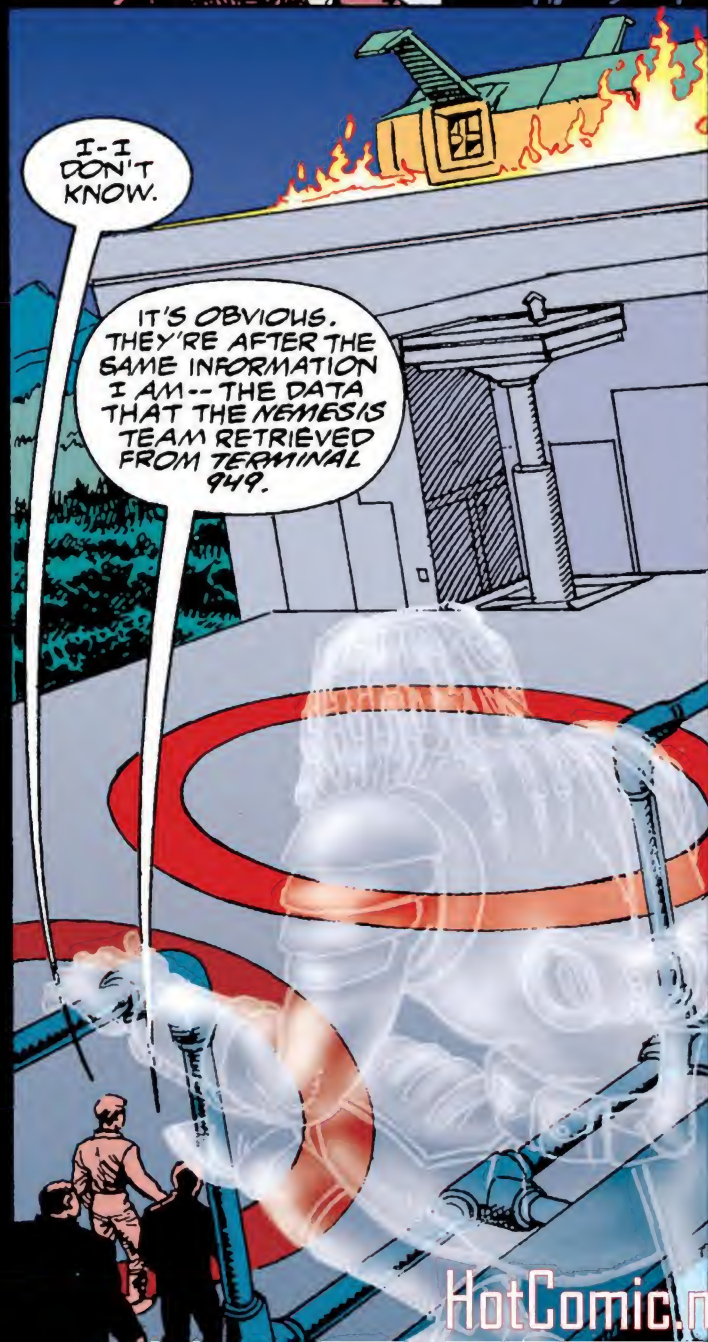
BA-BOOM!

THANK YOU FOR THAT DEDUCTION, VINCENT.



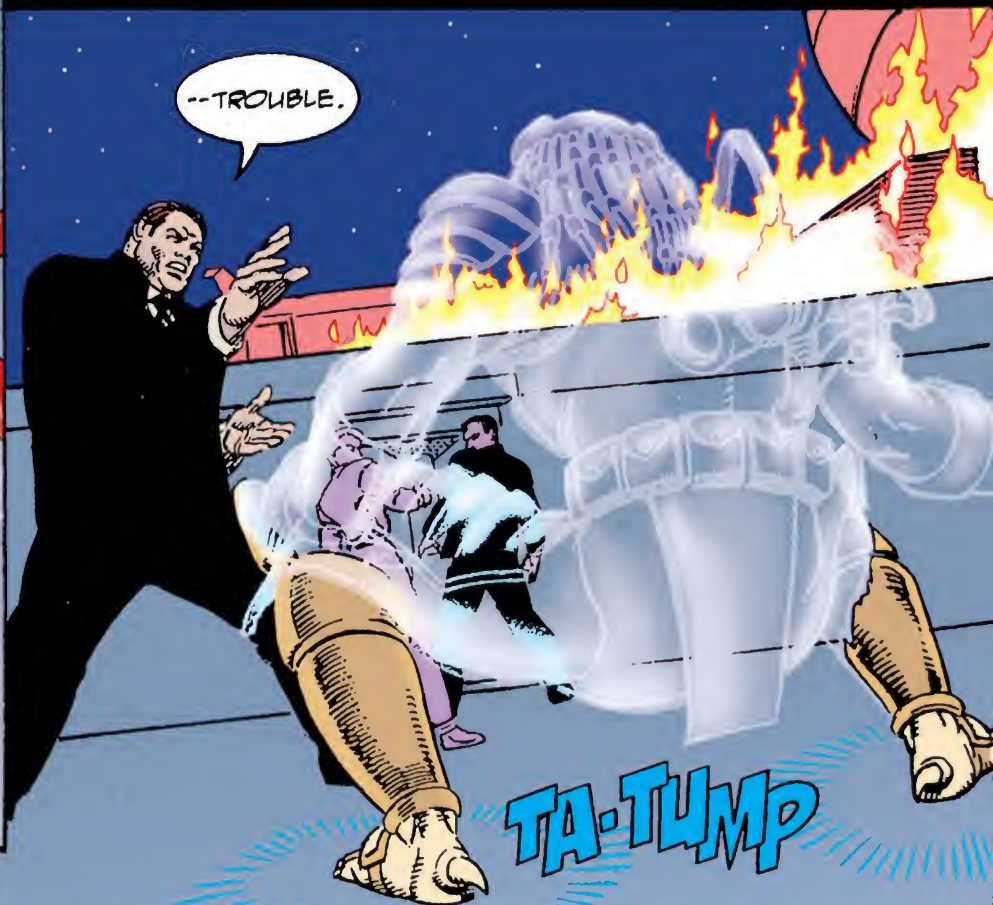
THINK ABOUT IT. YOUR SURVEY HAS TURNED UP NOTHING OF PARTICULAR VALUE ON BLUNDA, RIGHT?

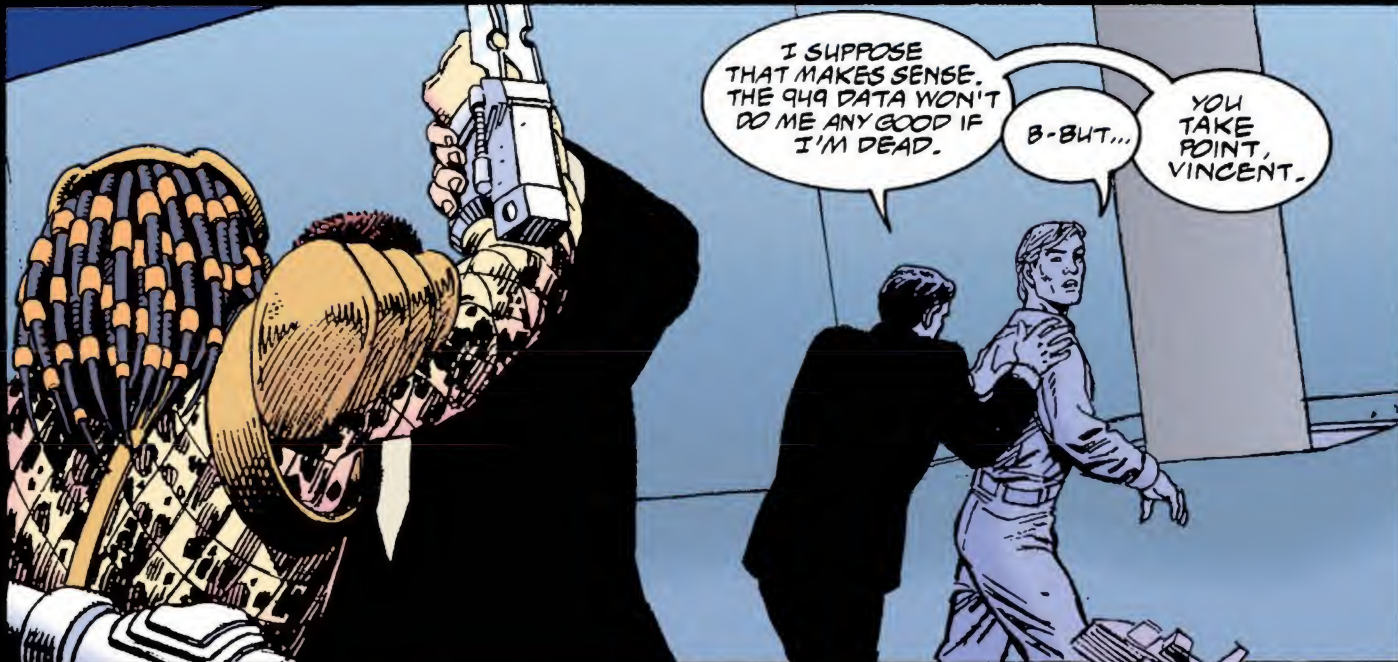
YET SOMEONE HAS DEEMED IT NECESSARY TO ATTACK YOUR SURVEY PLATFORM AND KILL YOUR PEOPLE. WHY?



I-I DON'T KNOW.

IT'S OBVIOUS. THEY'RE AFTER THE SAME INFORMATION I AM-- THE DATA THAT THE NEMESIS TEAM RETRIEVED FROM TERMINAL 949.





I SUPPOSE THAT MAKES SENSE. THE 949 DATA WON'T DO ME ANY GOOD IF I'M DEAD.

B-BUT...

YOU TAKE POINT, VINCENT.

BUT TO WHERE? THERE GOES YOUR SHIP!

DAMN IRWIN! I'LL HAVE HER HIDE FOR THIS!



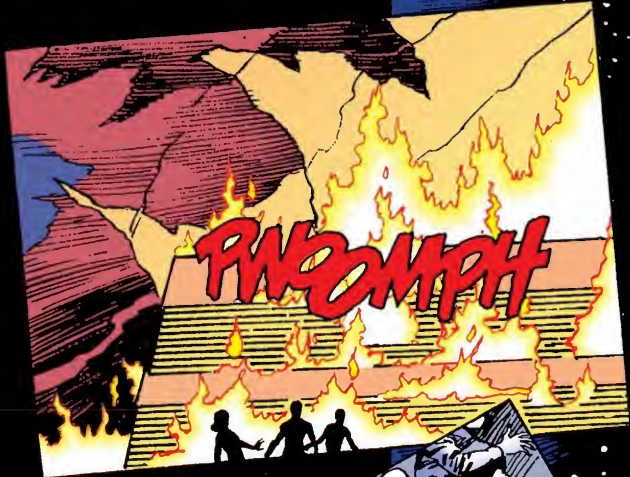
YOU OKAY, JESS?

DAMN, ELLIS! YA EVER HEARD THE WORD "OVERKILL"?



WHAT DID YOU DO?

I THINK I KILLED HS.



TO WHAT?
WHOA!

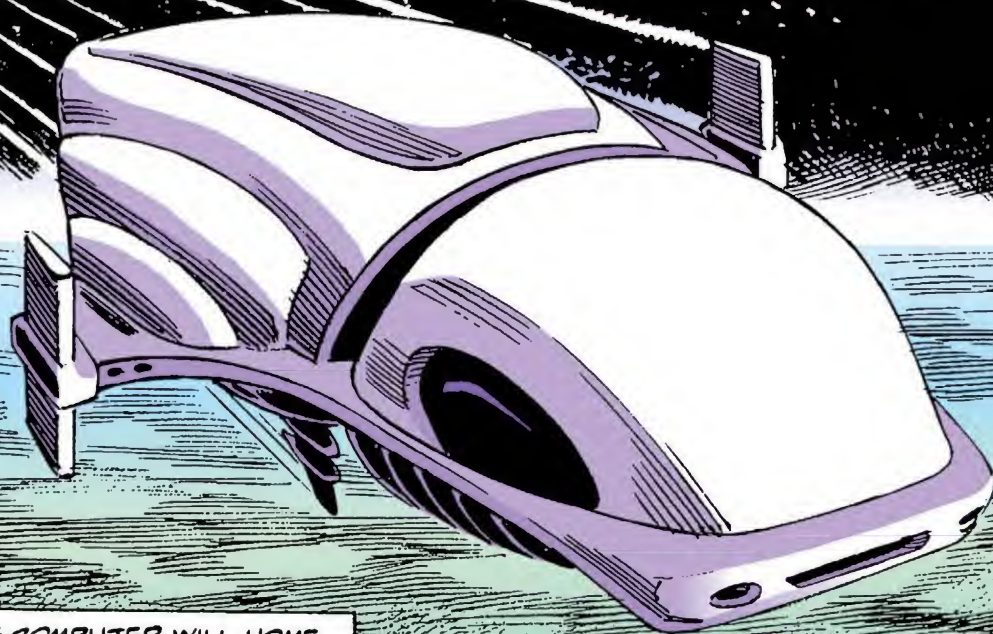


VINCENT,
WHAT'S
HAPPENING?

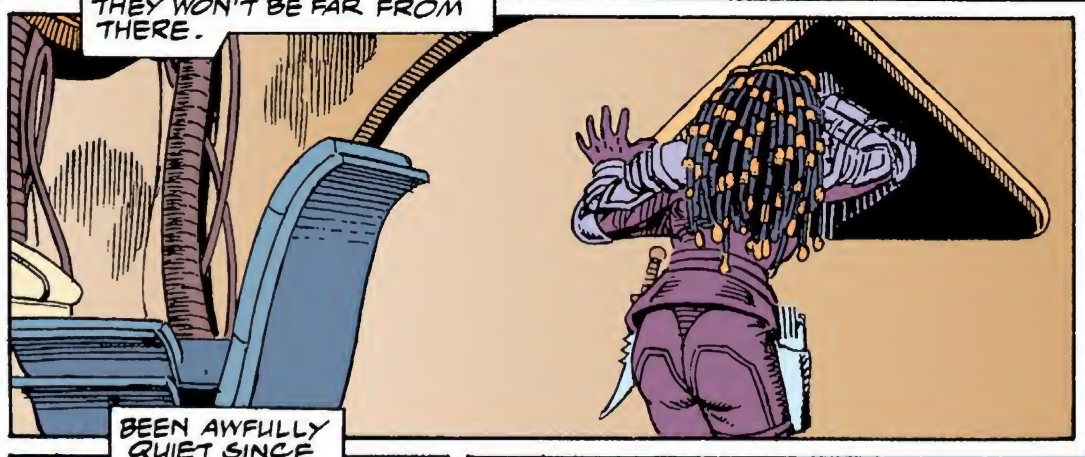
THE
ENVELOPE'S
EXPLODED!
WE'RE GOING
TO CRASH!



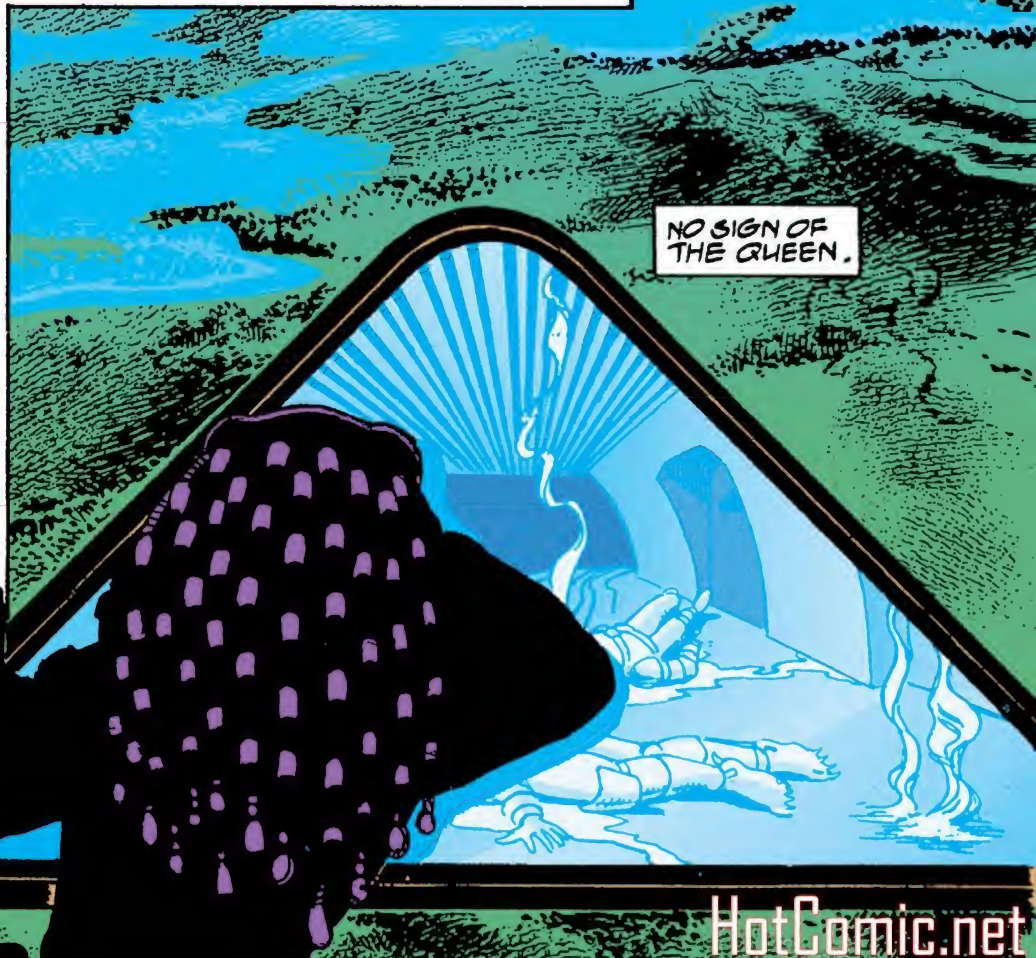
ALMOST
THERE.



THE COMPUTER WILL HOME
IN ON THE SIGNAL FROM
TOPKNOT'S LANDING CRAFT.
THEY WON'T BE FAR FROM
THERE.



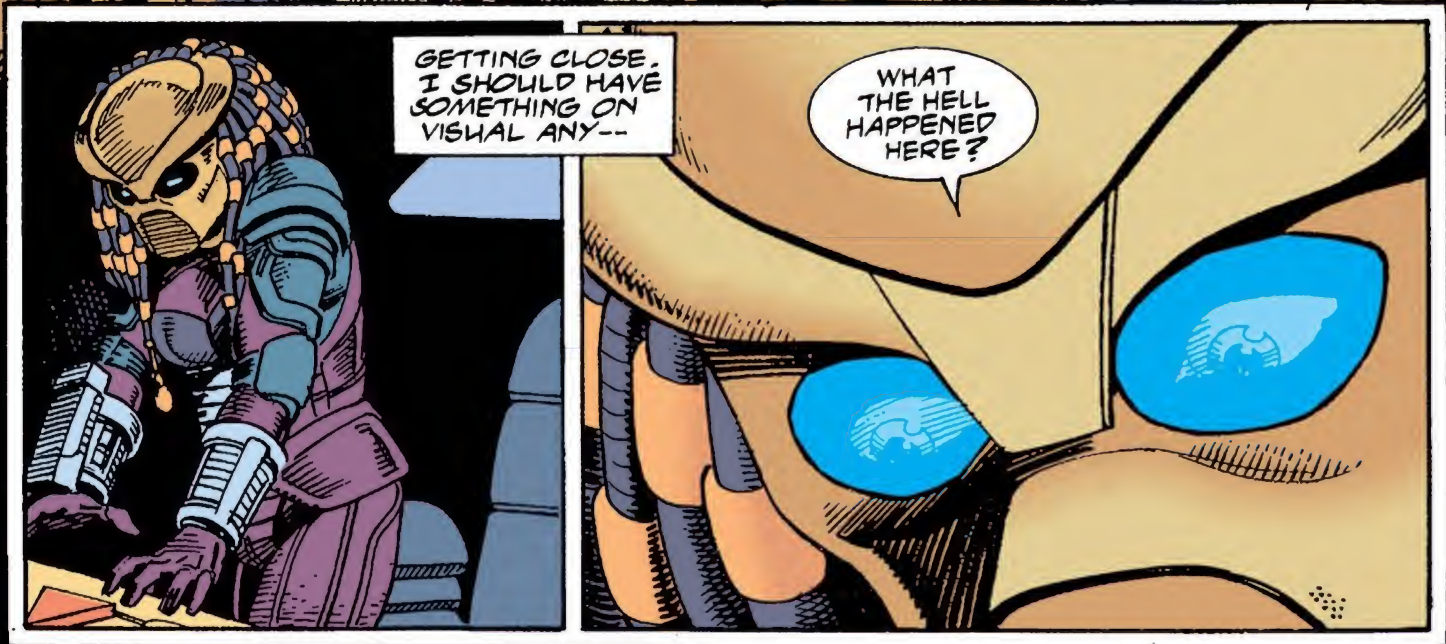
BEEN AWFULLY
QUIET SINCE
THE FIGHT.



NO SIGN OF
THE QUEEN.



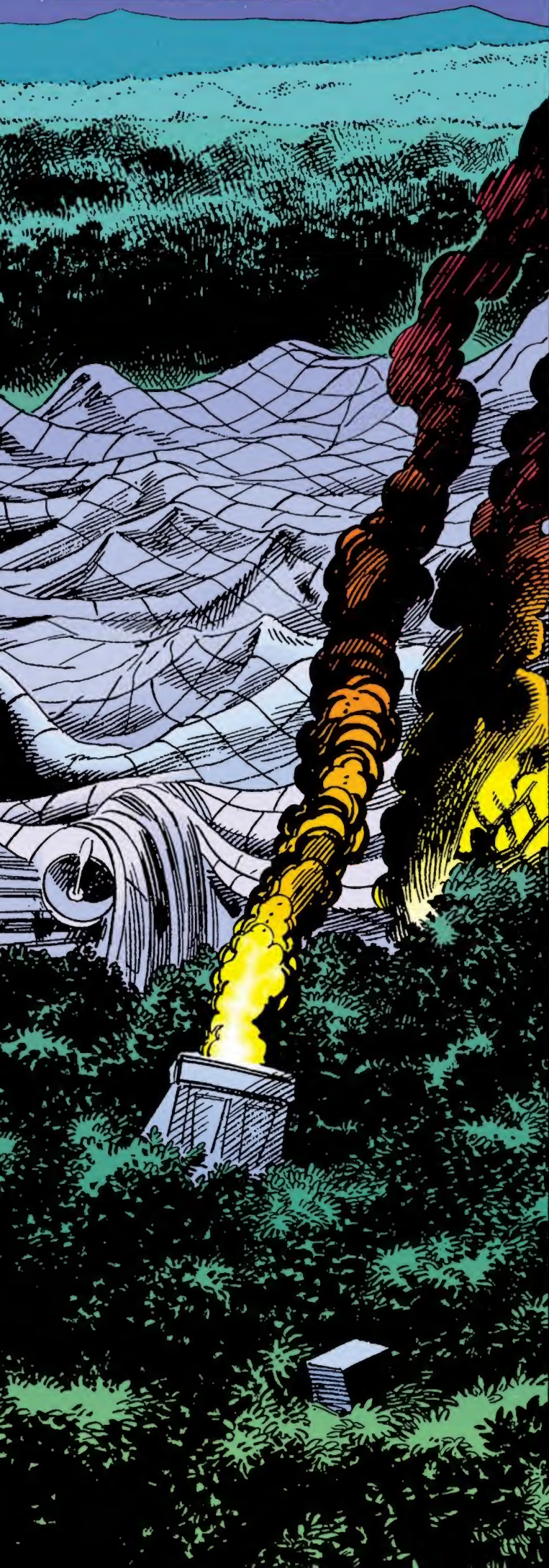
I WONDER
WHAT SHE'S
UP TO.



GETTING CLOSE.
I SHOULD HAVE
SOMETHING ON
VISUAL ANY---

WHAT
THE HELL
HAPPENED
HERE?

DID TOPKNOT AND HIS TROOP
DO THIS? I EXPECTED
TROUBLE, BUT...



DOWN
HERE! DOWN
HERE!

QUIET,
ELLIS! WHAT'RE
YOU TRYING
TO DO?

"DOES THAT LOOK LIKE
A RESCUE SHIP?"



"WE'RE IN DEEP, KID, AND
IT LOOKS LIKE MORE
TROUBLE'S ON THE WAY."

IT'S OBVIOUS WHERE THE ACTION
IS. I'D BETTER FORGET ABOUT
TOPKNOT'S LANDING CRAFT
AND SET THE SHIP DOWN NEAR
THAT WRECK.



IF I CAN...

MAYBE I WAS WRONG... LOOKS LIKE IT'S GOING AWAY.

THAT DOESN'T HELP US. WHOEVER ATTACKED THE PLATFORM IS STILL OUT THERE.

YEAH, BUT THEY DON'T KNOW THEY'RE UP AGAINST A COUPLE OF EX-COLONIAL MARINES.

THIS IS ALL MY FAULT.

THAT'S NOT TRUE! YOU SAVED OUR LIVES BACK ON 949 WHEN YOU GOT INTO THAT M.A.X. SUIT.

AND YOU SAVED MY BUTT AGAIN TONIGHT--

YEAH, AND BLEW UP THE WHOLE PLATFORM DOING IT!

LARA, YOU AND JESS HAVE HAD TRAINING FOR THIS KIND OF STUFF. YOU'D BE BETTER OFF IF YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT ME.

YOU ONLY DID WHAT YOU HAD TO.

BUT EITHER ONE OF YOU WOULD'VE DONE IT BETTER!

SO YOU MADE A MISTAKE. WE ALL HAVE. YOU CAN'T CHANGE THE PAST.



THE
BEST YOU CAN
HOPE FOR IS
THAT YOU STAY
ALIVE TO
LEARN FROM
YOUR
MISTAKES.

AND
SPEAKING OF
STAYING ALIVE,
LET'S SEE IF WE
CAN MAKE THIS
PLACE MORE
DEFENSIBLE.

WE'LL
TRY TO
GET OUT
OF HERE
AT FIRST
LIGHT.

ELLIS,
GIVE ME A
HAND WITH...

ELLIS...?



ELLIS!

AW,
NOW
WHAT?
COME
BACK
HERE!



STUPID
KID! I'LL
GO GET--
HHH?

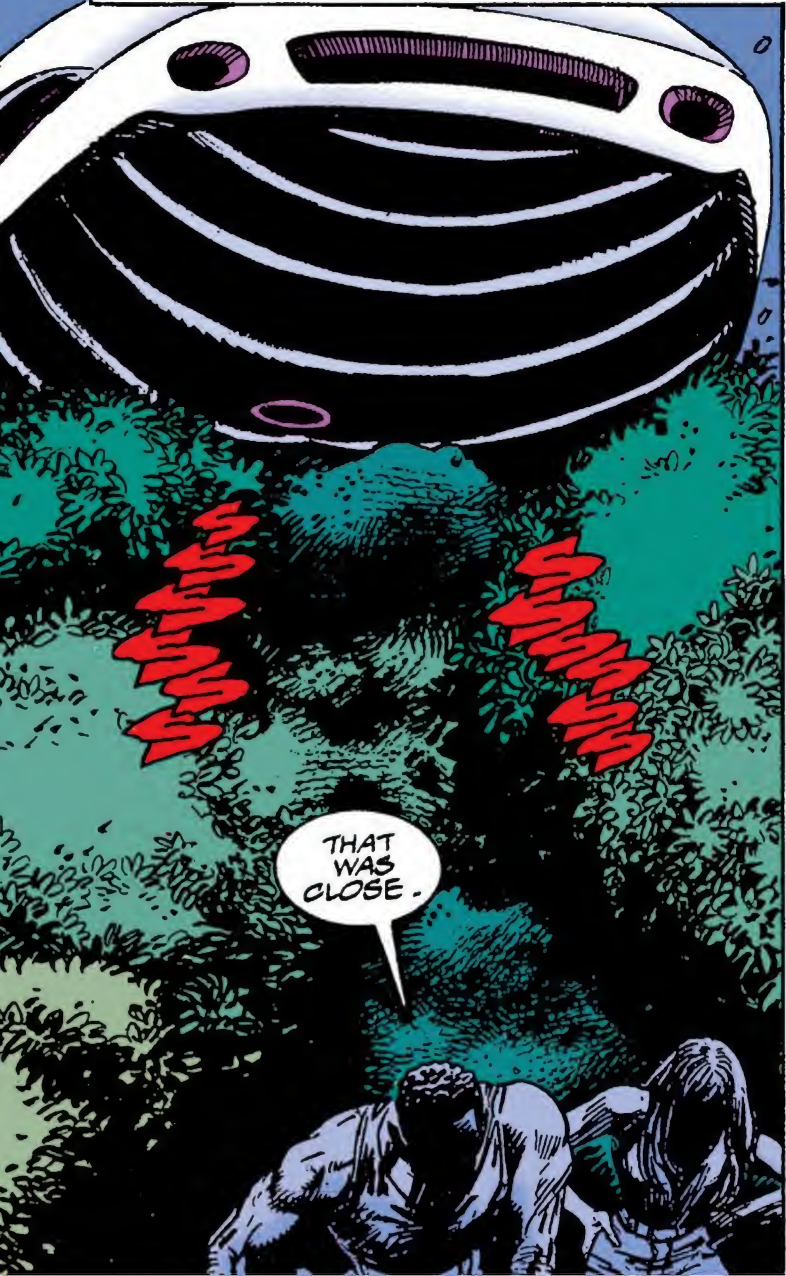
NO!



WHY
NOT?

LOOK!







SORRY,
I'VE NEVER
HAD MUCH
LUCK WITH
LANDINGS.

MY NAME'S
MACHIKO
NOBUCHI.
I'M HERE
TO HELP.



Y-YOU'RE
HUMAN?

UM,
YEAH.
THANKS...

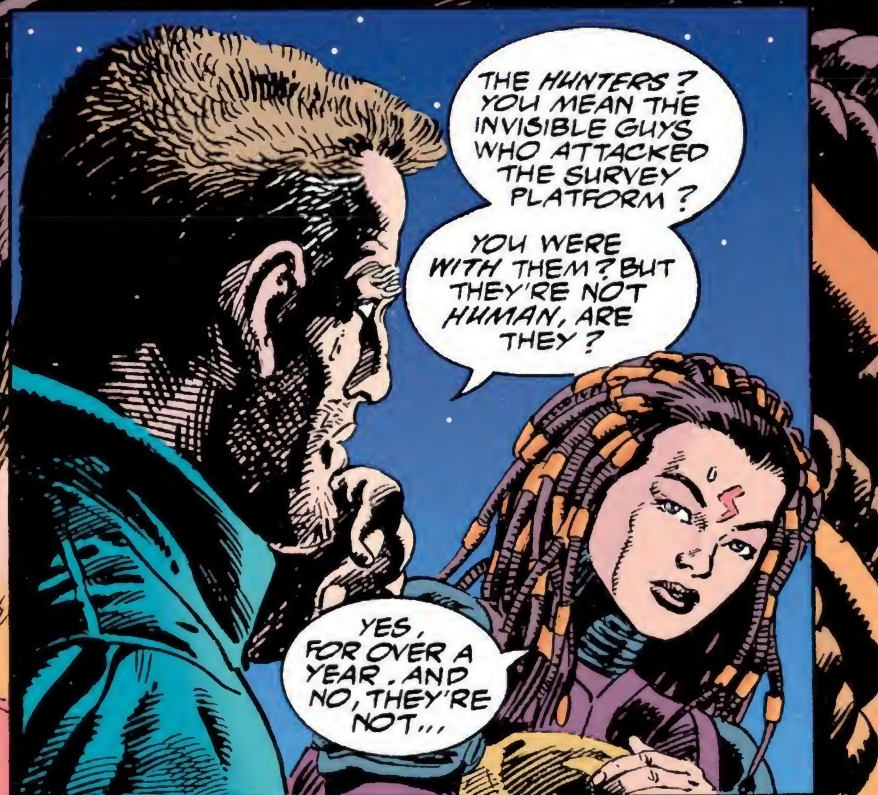
... I GUESS
I'D FORGOTTEN
THAT FOR A WHILE...
YOU DON'T KNOW
HOW GOOD IT IS
TO SPEAK WITH
PEOPLE AGAIN.

LOOK, MS. NOGUCHI,
YOU SAID YOU WERE
HERE TO HELP. DO
YOU MIND TELLING
US EXACTLY WHAT'S
GOING ON?



IT'S KIND OF A LONG STORY. LET'S JUST SAY I HEARD THAT PEOPLE ON THIS PLANET-- ON BUNDA-- WERE IN TROUBLE.

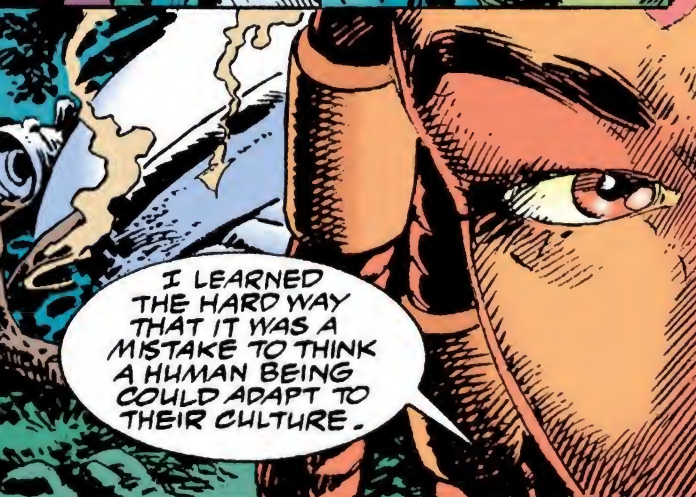
I HAD TO CHOOSE WHICH SIDE I WAS GOING TO BE ON-- THE HUNTERS' OR YOURS.



THE HUNTERS? YOU MEAN THE INVISIBLE GUYS WHO ATTACKED THE SURVEY PLATFORM?

YOU WERE WITH THEM? BUT THEY'RE NOT HUMAN, ARE THEY?

YES, FOR OVER A YEAR. AND NO, THEY'RE NOT...



I LEARNED THE HARD WAY THAT IT WAS A MISTAKE TO THINK A HUMAN BEING COULD ADAPT TO THEIR CULTURE.

NOW THEY'RE LEARNING JUST HOW BIG A MISTAKE IT WAS.



LOOK, I MADE QUITE AN ENTRANCE. IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE WE GET COMPANY.

YOU TWO AREN'T THE ONLY SURVIVORS, ARE YOU?

THREE. THERE ARE THREE OF US, ACTUALLY. THERE MAY BE OTHERS, BUT...

I GUESS WE HAVE A "LONG STORY" OF OUR OWN.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER SURVIVORS? WE'VE GOT TO ROUND THEM UP AND FIND SOME COVER.

UM...



I'M KATE LARA,
THIS IS MARTIN JESS.
THE THIRD MEMBER
OF OUR GROUP
IS BRIAN--

ELLIS. HE RAN
OFF A BIT AGO--
TRYIN' TO GET
HIMSELF KILLED,
NEAR AS I CAN
TELL.

AS FOR ANY OTHERS,
WE SAW A COUPLE OF
'COPTERS AND A SHUTTLE
GET AWAY BEFORE THE
PLATFORM CRASHED, SO
MAYBE THEY ALL GOT
TO SAFETY...

...BUT
I HOPE
NOT.

HE'S MAD
BECAUSE THE
PLATFORM'S
SUPERVISOR
HAD US
ARRESTED--
ON COMPANY
ORDERS.

TELL
HER
WHY.

THERE ARE
THESE CREATURES--
ALIENS-- HORRIBLE
THINGS. THEY CAN ADAPT
TO ANY ENVIRONMENT,
AND THEY'VE BEEN
DISCOVERED ALL OVER
THE COLONIES.

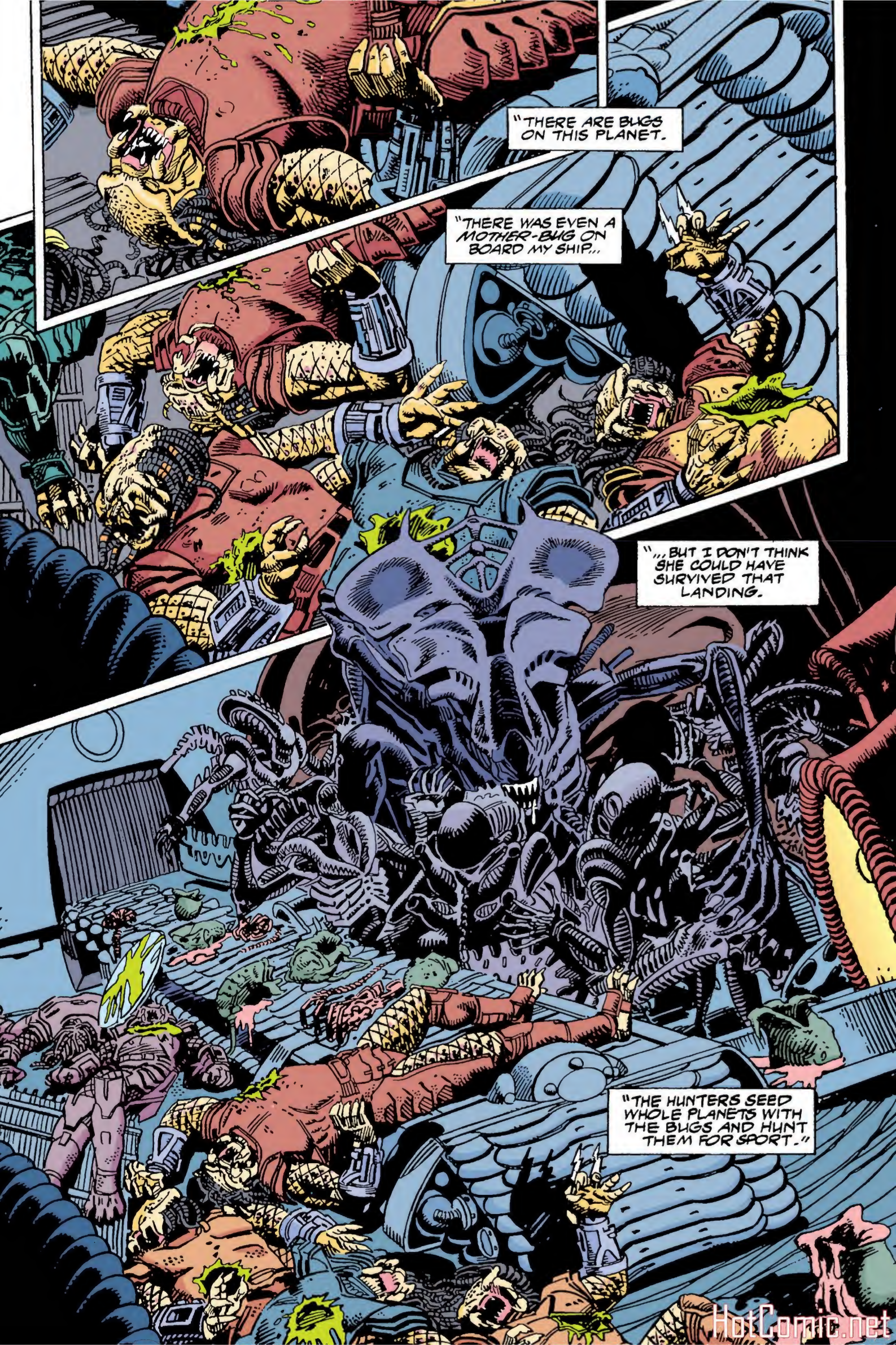
JESS, ELLIS, AND
I WERE PART OF AN
EXTERMINATION TEAM
THAT WAS SENT TO A
SPACE STATION TO WIPE
OUT AN INFESTATION.
WHAT WE DIDN'T KNOW
WAS THAT THE STATION
HAD BEEN INFESTED
BY THE COMPANY--

ON PURPOSE!
THEY WANTED TO SEE
HOW LONG IT WOULD
TAKE THE ALIENS TO
KILL FOUR HUNDRED
INNOCENT PEOPLE--
MEN, WOMEN, AND
CHILDREN.

SOME OF THE
HIGHER-UPS DIDN'T
APPRECIATE THE FACT
THAT WE BLEW THEIR
DATA TO ATOMS,
ALONG WITH THE
STATION AND
THE--

--BUGS.

YES, I
KNOW ALL ABOUT
BUGS. WE HAVE
MORE IN COMMON
THAN YOU
KNOW.



"THERE ARE BUGS
ON THIS PLANET."

"THERE WAS EVEN A
MOTHER-BUG ON
BOARD MY SHIP."

"... BUT I DON'T THINK
SHE COULD HAVE
SURVIVED THAT
LANDING."

"THE HUNTERS SEED
WHOLE PLANETS WITH
THE BUGS AND HUNT
THEM FOR SPORT."



SOME
SPORT! I DON'T
THINK I WANT TO
GO UP AGAINST
INVISIBLE CREATURES
WHO THINK HUNTING
ALIENS IS FUN.

THE WHOLE
CULTURE IS BUILT
AROUND HUNTING. IT'S
REALLY QUITE
EXHILARATING WHEN
YOU'RE IN IT...



... WHEN
YOU'RE ONE OF
THE
HUNTERS.



AS FOR
GOING UP
AGAINST
THEM--



--IT
DOESN'T LOOK
LIKE WE HAVE
A CHOICE.



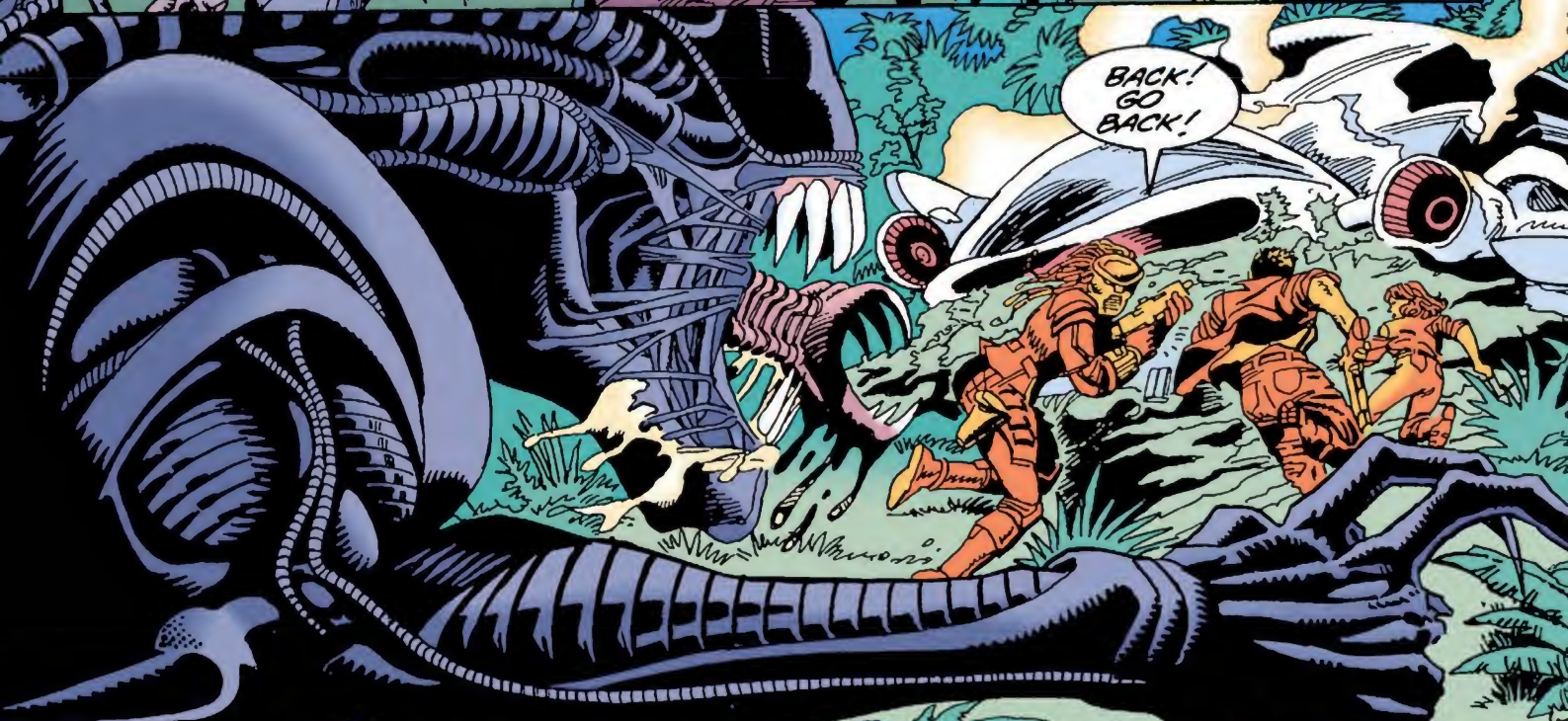
BOOM

BA-BOOM
BA-BOOM

BLAM
BLAM

BLAM

FOLLOW ME!





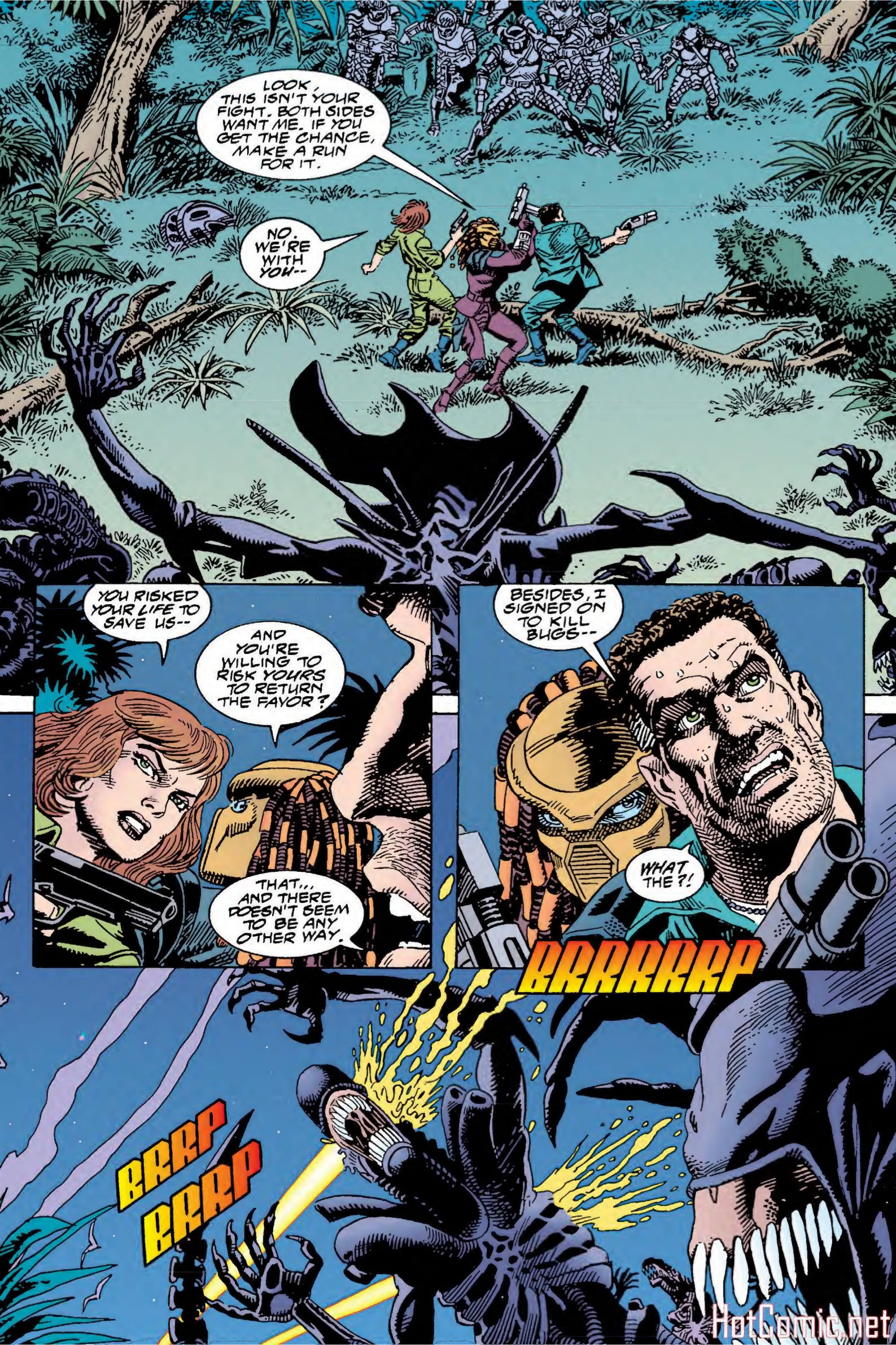
YOU WERE SURE AS HELL RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING, LADY...
--IT'S EXHILARATING.

TOPKNOT. HE KNOWS WHAT I'VE DONE. I'VE BROKEN THE CODE. I'M NOT JUST AN OUTSIDER TO THE CLAN...

... I'M THE CLAN'S WORST ENEMY.

I WAS ALREADY THE QUEEN'S.





LOOK, THIS ISN'T YOUR FIGHT. BOTH SIDES WANT ME. IF YOU GET THE CHANCE, MAKE A RUN FOR IT.

NO. WE'RE WITH YOU--

YOU RISKED YOUR LIFE TO SAVE US--

AND YOU'RE WILLING TO RISK YOURS TO RETURN THE FAVOR?

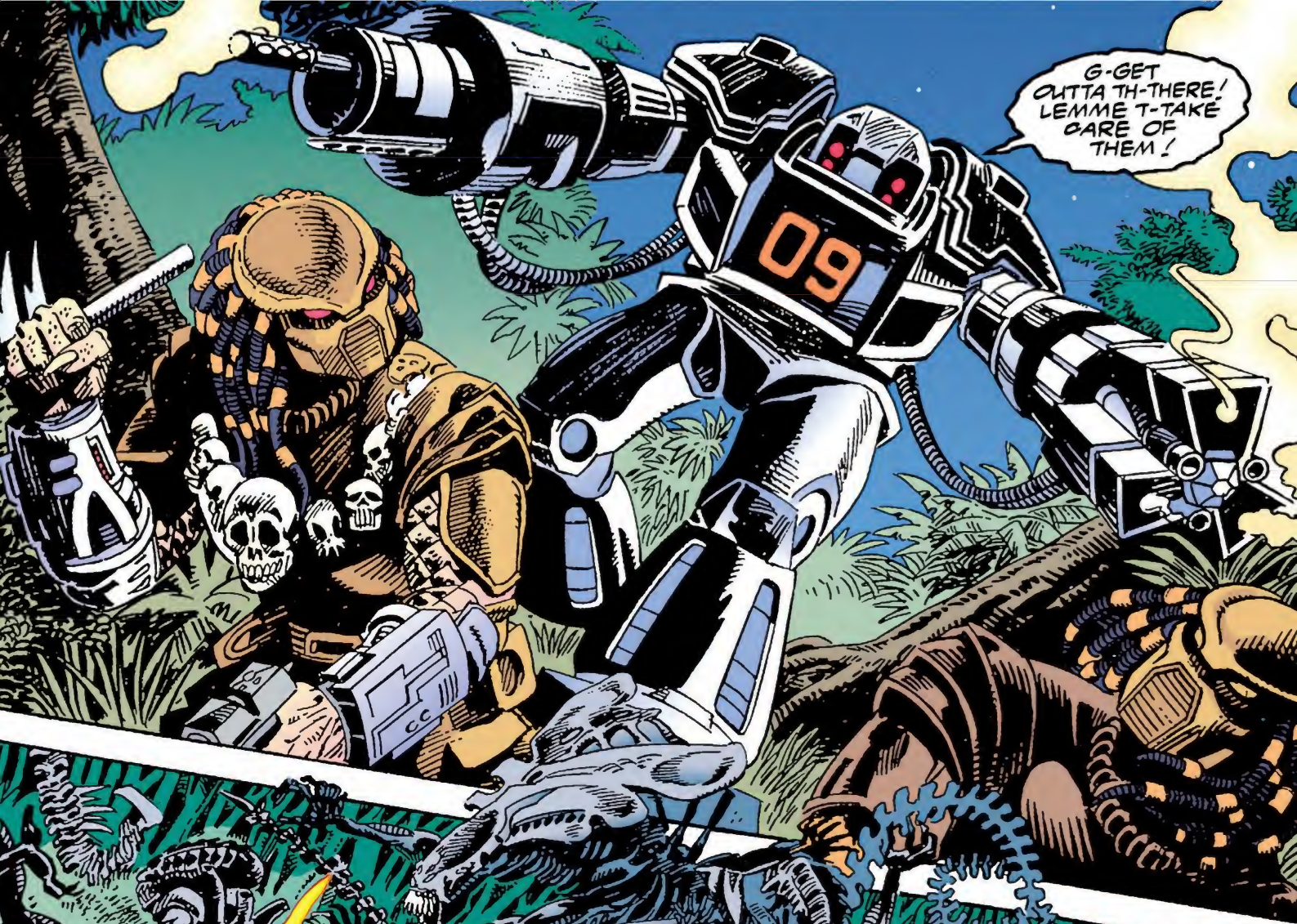
THAT... AND THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANY OTHER WAY.

BESIDES, I SIGNED ON TO KILL BUGS--

WHAT THE?!

BRRRRRRRP

BRRP
BRRP

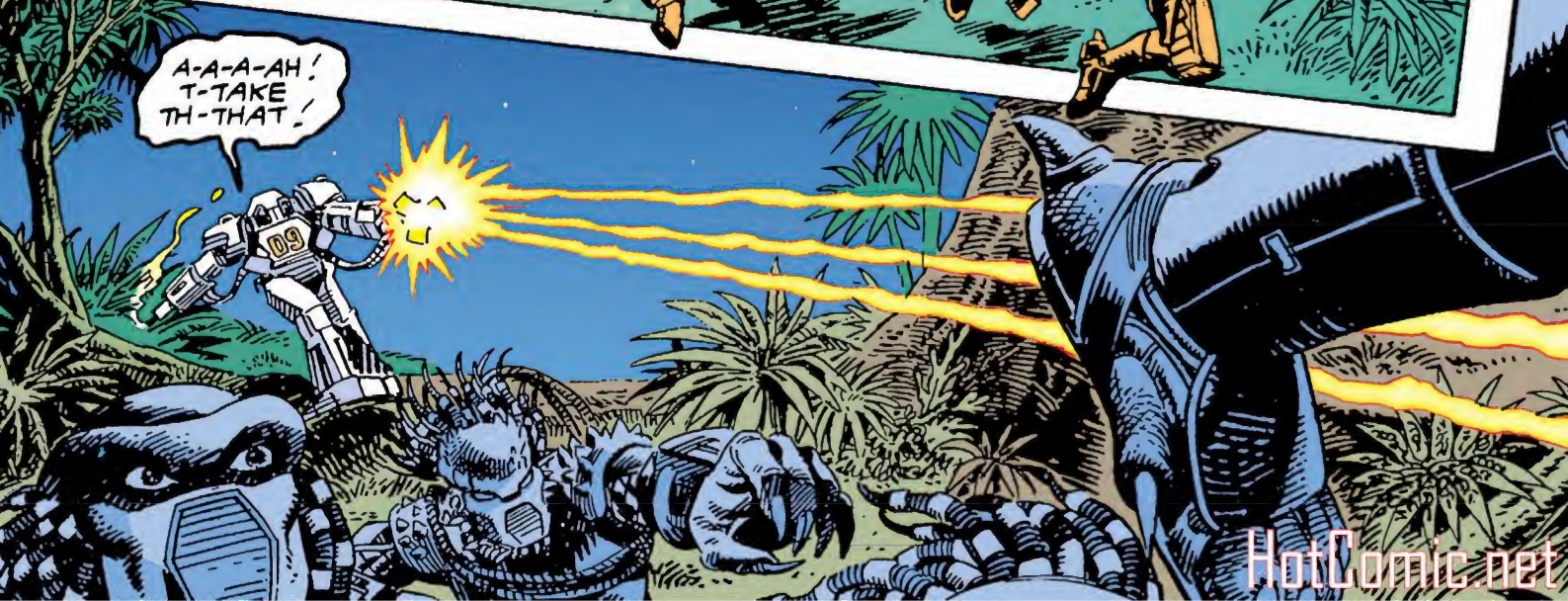


G-GET
OUTTA TH-THERE!
LEMME T-TAKE
CARE OF
THEM!

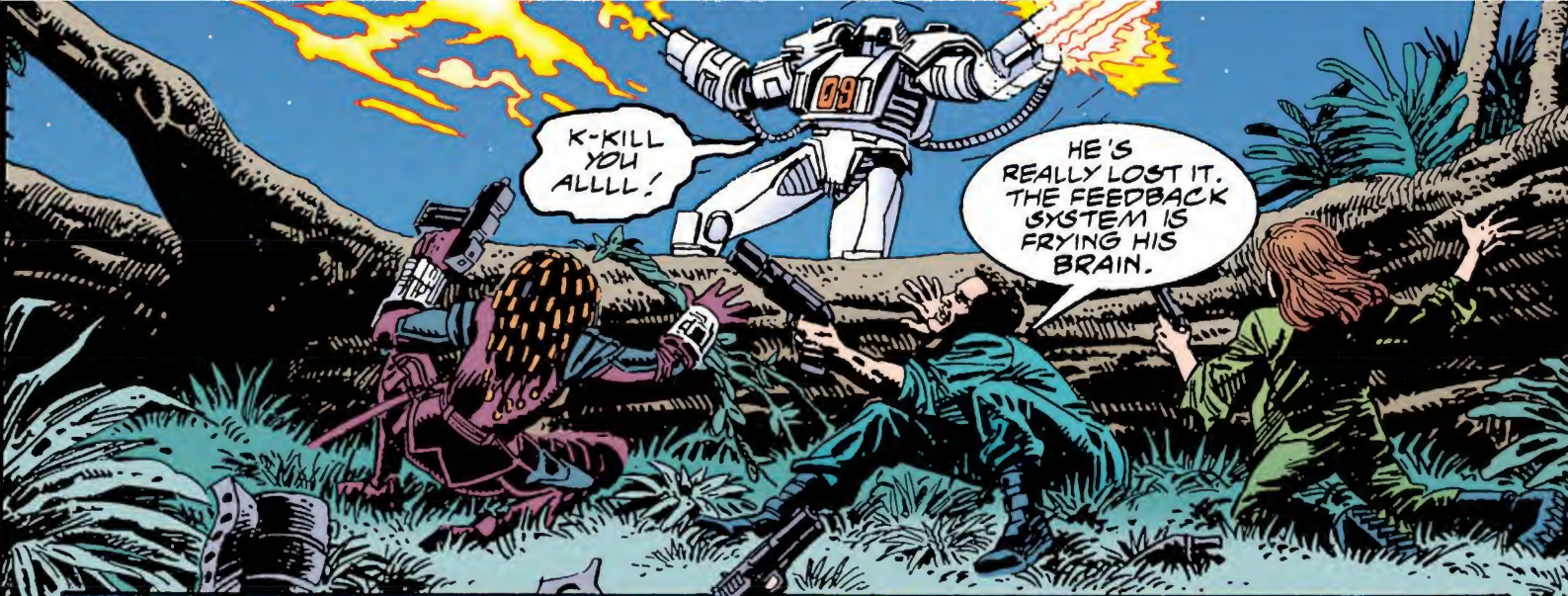


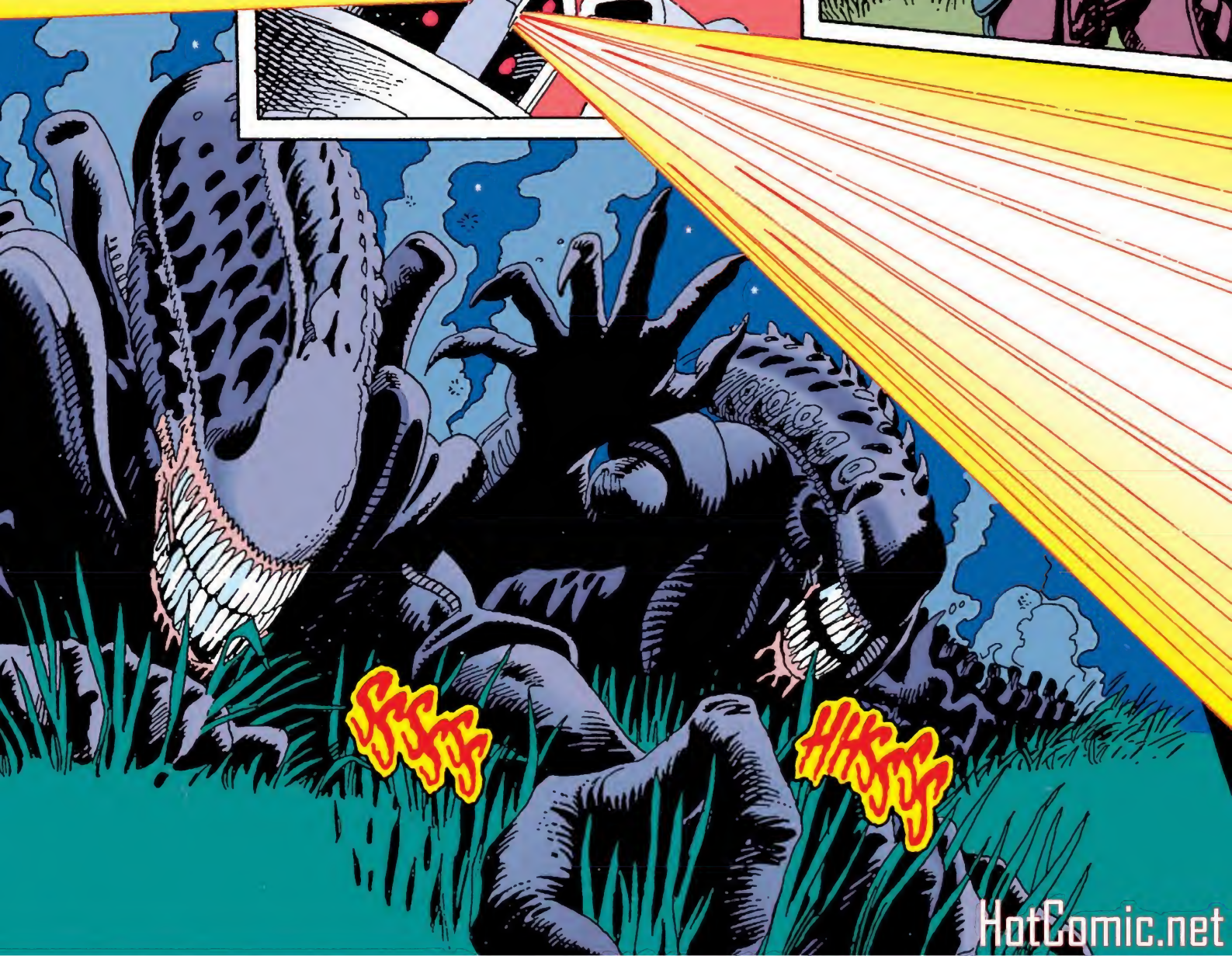
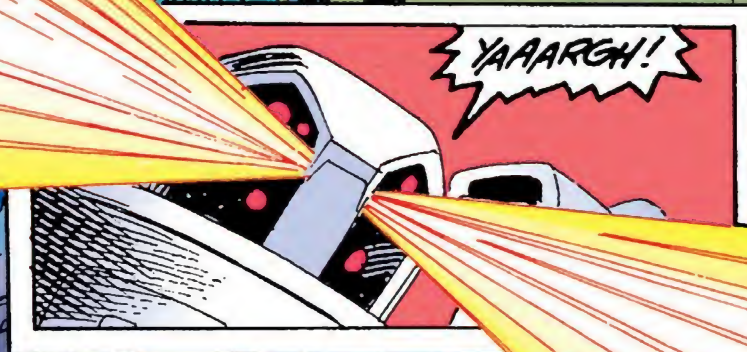
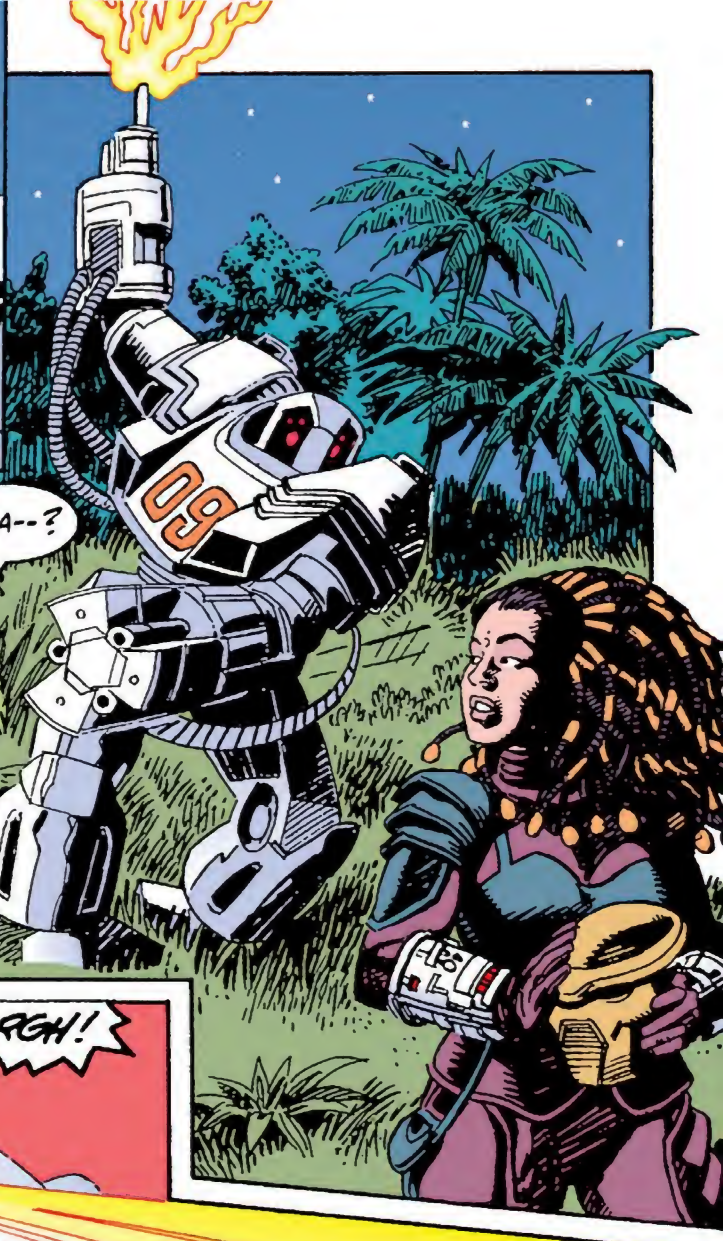
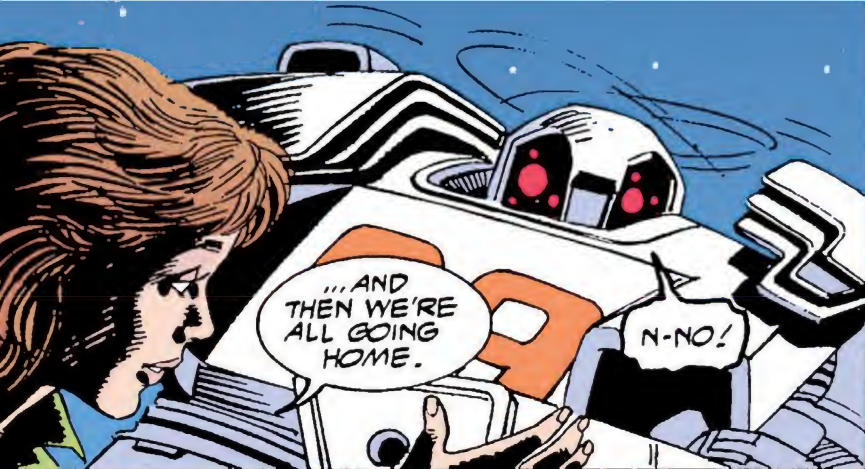
RUN!

RRRRRRRRPP



A-A-A-AH!
T-TAKE
TH-THAT







D-DON'T M-MAKE
ME LAUGH, JESS. IT'S
ALL I C-CAN DO TO
KEEP THE SUIT
UNDER C-CONTROL!

NO.
IF YOU'RE
G-GONNA SURVIVE,
YOU NEED ME IN
THE SUIT. NO
ARGUMENTS.

WOW.


JEEZ,
ELLIS, THIS
BURNING-XTS-TO-
CINDERS BUSINESS
IS GETTIN' TO BE
A THING WITH
YOU.

THEN
WE'D BETTER
GET YOU
OUT OF
THERE--

OH,
ELLIS...

S-SO,
WHERE D-DO
WE GO
FROM
HERE?

ONLY
ONE PLACE
TO GO...




... IF WE
WANT TO GET
OFF THIS PLANET.
FOLLOW ME.


" I'M WARNING YOU, THOUGH--
IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY.
THE HUNTERS HAVE IT IN FOR
ME NOW. THEY WANT MY BLOOD.

" THE GOOD THING
IS, THEY'LL PLAY BY
THEIR RULES--RULES
THEY'VE SPENT THE
LAST YEAR OR SO
TEACHING ME.

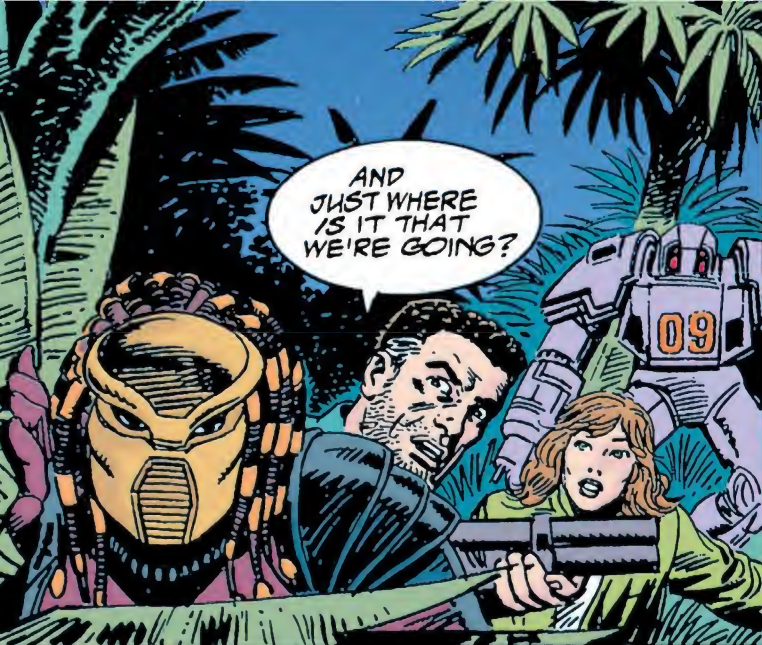
" THEN THERE'S THE MAMA BUG
AND HER BROOD. SHE AND I
HAVE A HISTORY, AND IF ANY-
THING, SHE WANTS ME WORSE
THAN TOPKNOT AND HIS TROUPE.



" AND SHE WON'T PLAY
BY ANY RULES THAT
WE EVEN UNDERSTAND.



" ON TOP OF EVERYTHING
ELSE, I HAVE NO IDEA
WHAT KIND OF MONSTERS
MAY BE NATIVE TO THIS
WORLD.



AND
JUST WHERE
IS IT THAT
WE'RE GOING?



HMM. GOOD POINT.
OKAY, IF WE GET
SPLIT UP, HERE'S
WHAT YOU DO.

THE
HUNTING PARTY
ARRIVED IN A
SHUTTLE. IT'S JUST
A FEW CLICKS DUE
SOUTH OF HERE.
IT'LL BE IN A
CLEARING, AND--

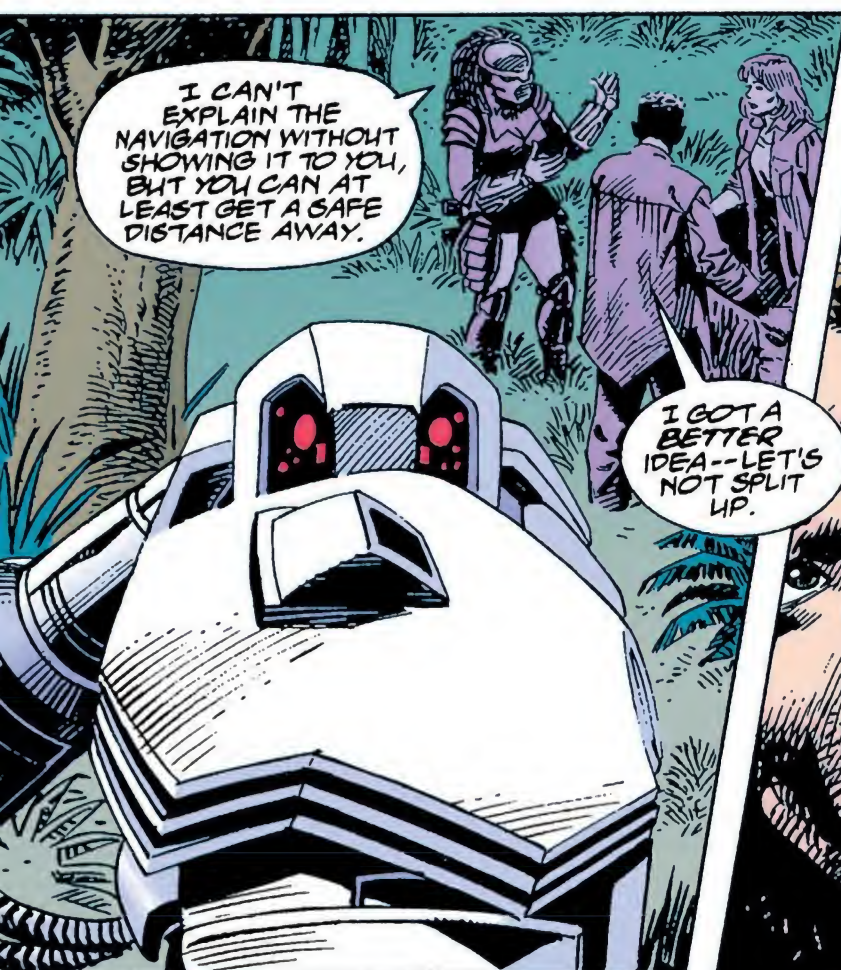
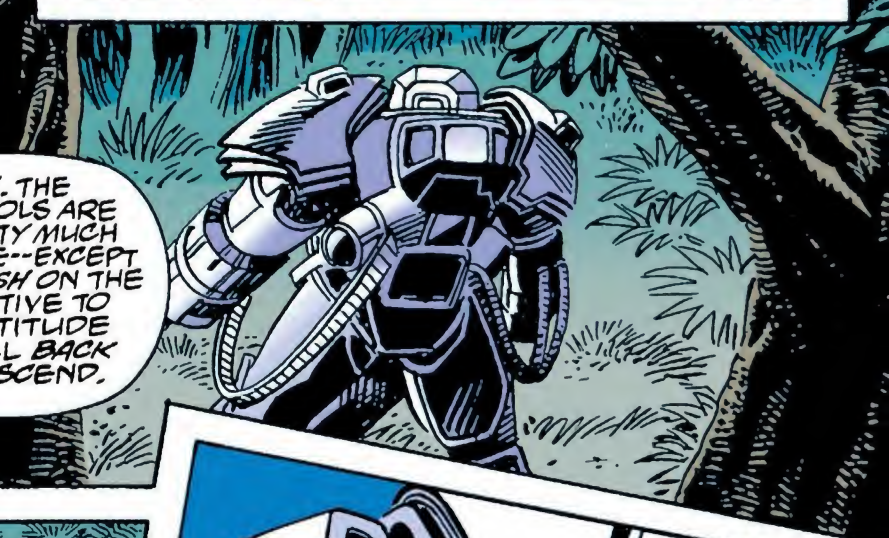
AND WE'RE
SUPPOSED
TO FLY AN
ALIEN
SHIP?



YOU
TRAINED
AS A
PILOT?

I AM.

OKAY. THE
CONTROLS ARE
PRETTY MUCH
INTUITIVE--EXCEPT
YOU PUSH ON THE
COLLECTIVE TO
GAIN ALTITUDE
AND PULL BACK
TO DESCEND.



I CAN'T
EXPLAIN THE
NAVIGATION WITHOUT
SHOWING IT TO YOU,
BUT YOU CAN AT
LEAST GET A SAFE
DISTANCE AWAY.

I GOT A
BETTER
IDEA--LET'S
NOT SPLIT
UP.



SOMEBODY'S
COMING!



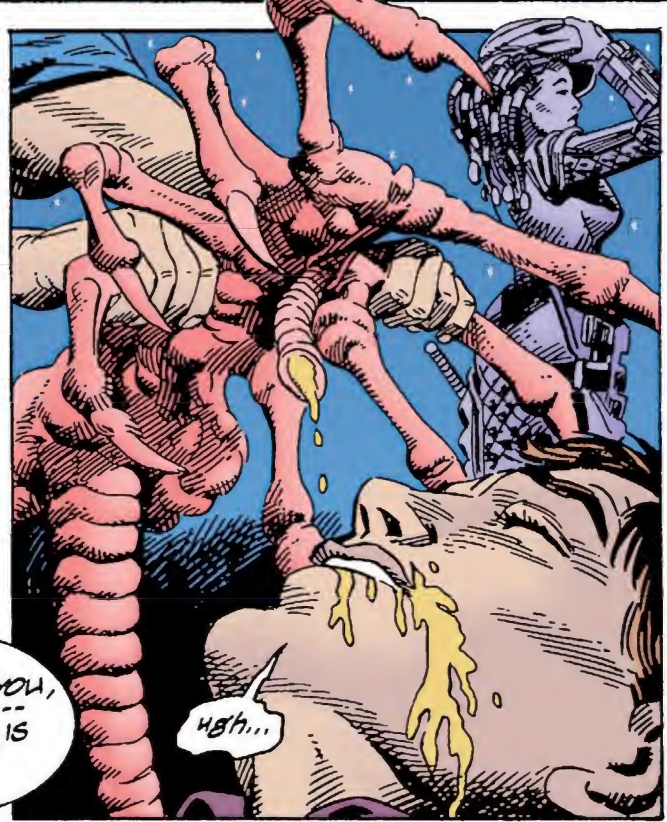


WHEN I TRIED TO PULL IT OFF OF HIM, HE STARTED CHOKING.

IT'S MY JOB TO PROTECT MR. BRIGGS, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.

LET'S SEE...

I GOT NEWS FOR YOU, NIRASAWA-- YOUR BOSS IS BEYOND HELP.



ugh...



AND, AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, IT COULDN'T HAPPEN TO A NICER GUY.

JESS--!

QUIET!

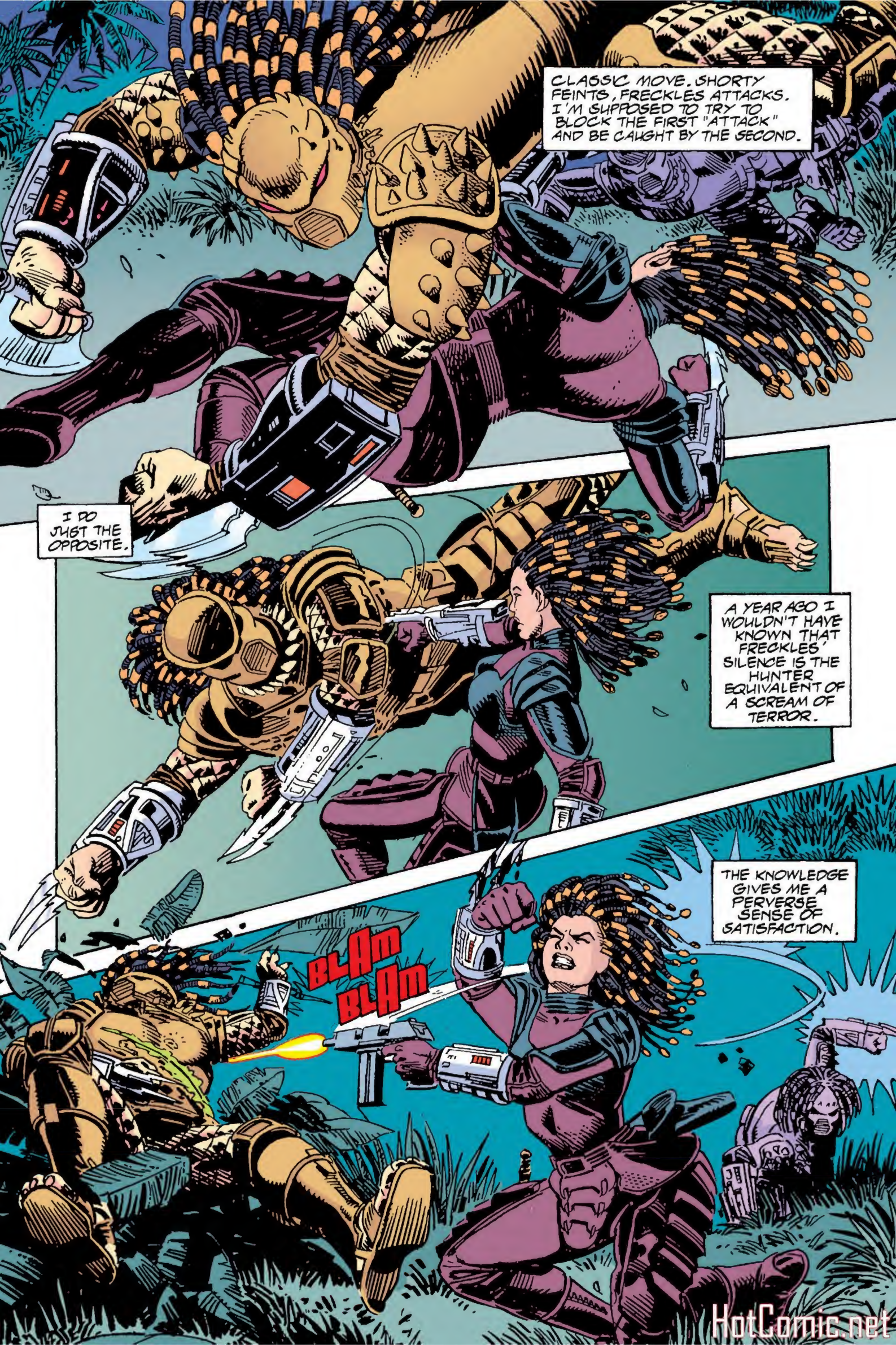
ARGHIE THIS LATER, OKAY?



I THINK IT'S TIME WE SPLIT UP...

NIRASAWA, JESS IS RIGHT-- IT'S TOO LATE TO HELP YOUR MASTER. BUT IF THERE'S ANY PART OF YOUR PROGRAMMING THAT UNDERSTANDS REVENGE--





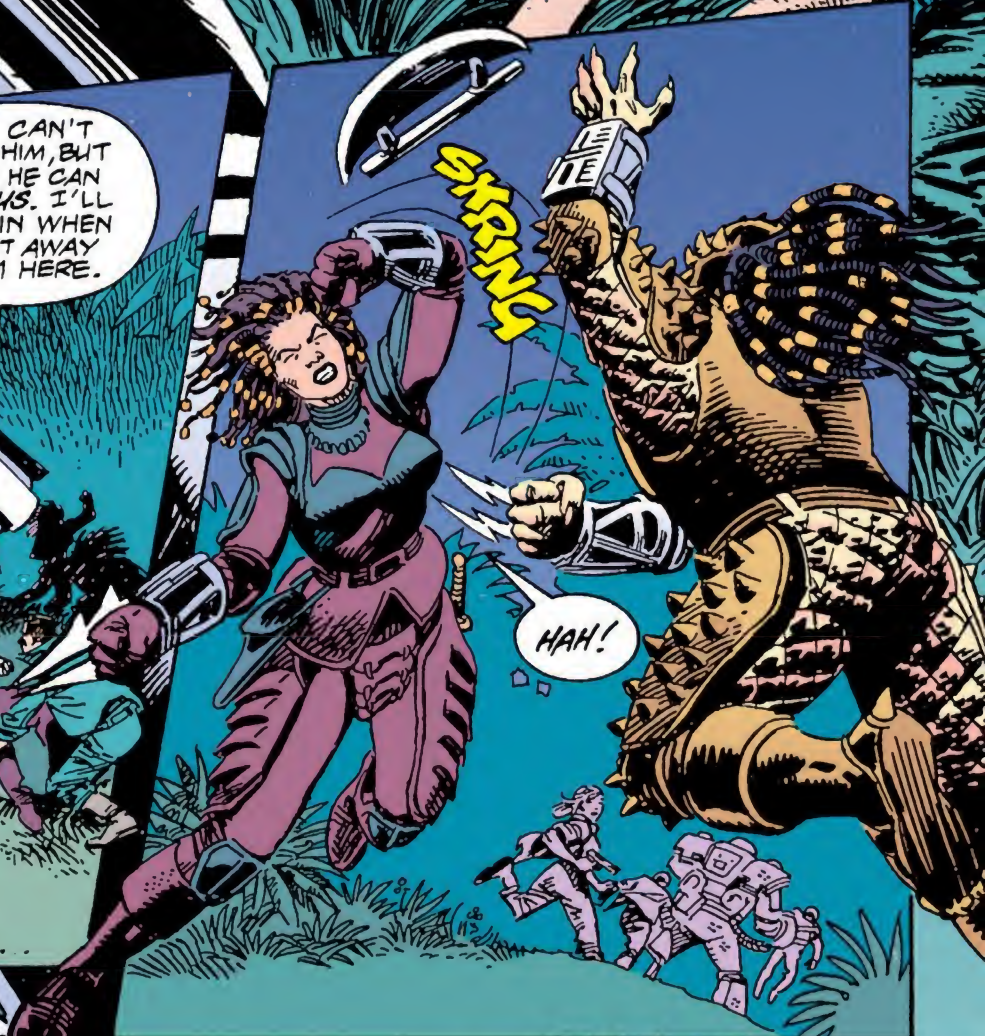
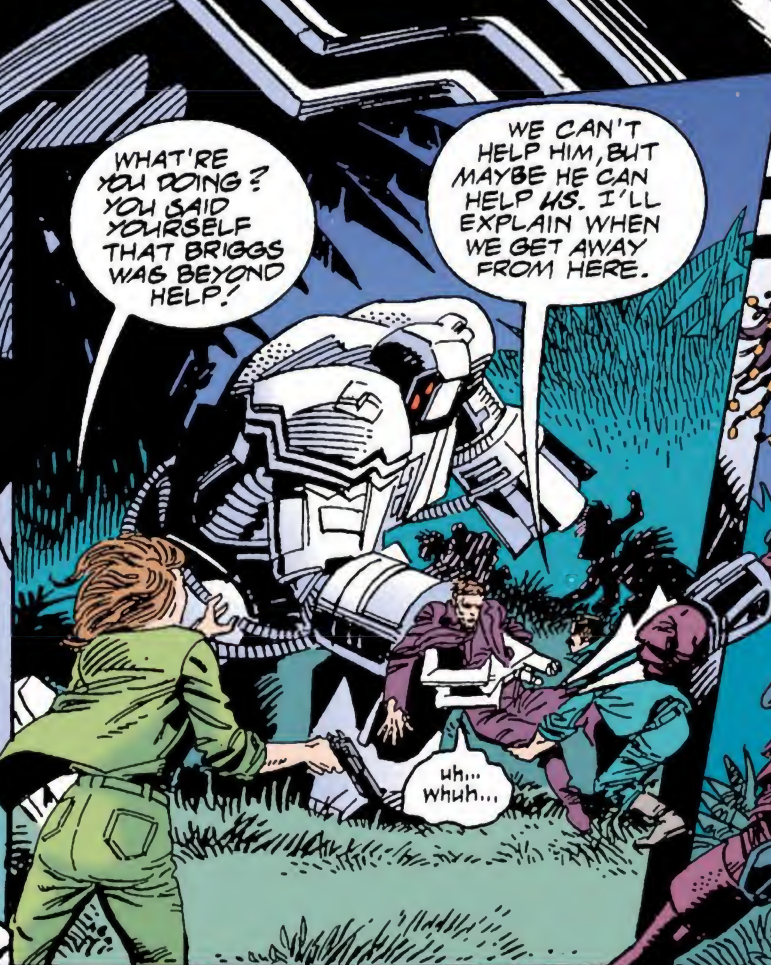
CLASSIC MOVE. SHORTY
FEINTS, FRECKLES ATTACKS.
I'M SUPPOSED TO TRY TO
BLOCK THE FIRST "ATTACK"
AND BE CAUGHT BY THE SECOND.

I DO
JUST THE
OPPOSITE.

A YEAR AGO I
WOULDN'T HAVE
KNOWN THAT
FRECKLES'
SILENCE IS THE
HUNTER
EQUIVALENT OF
A SCREAM OF
TERROR.

THE KNOWLEDGE
GIVES ME A
PERVERSE
SENSE OF
SATISFACTION.

BLAM
BLAM





WHAT'S
THE MATTER,
SHORTY?

NOT SO
TOUGH WITHOUT
SOMEBODY TO
BACK YOU UP?
YOU'RE NOT A
HUNTER. YOU'RE
JUST A
BULLY.

SLASH

I'M
MORE OF A
HUNTER
THAN
YOU.

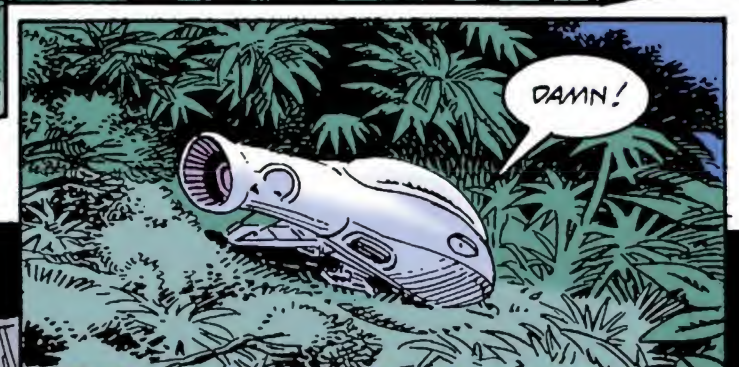
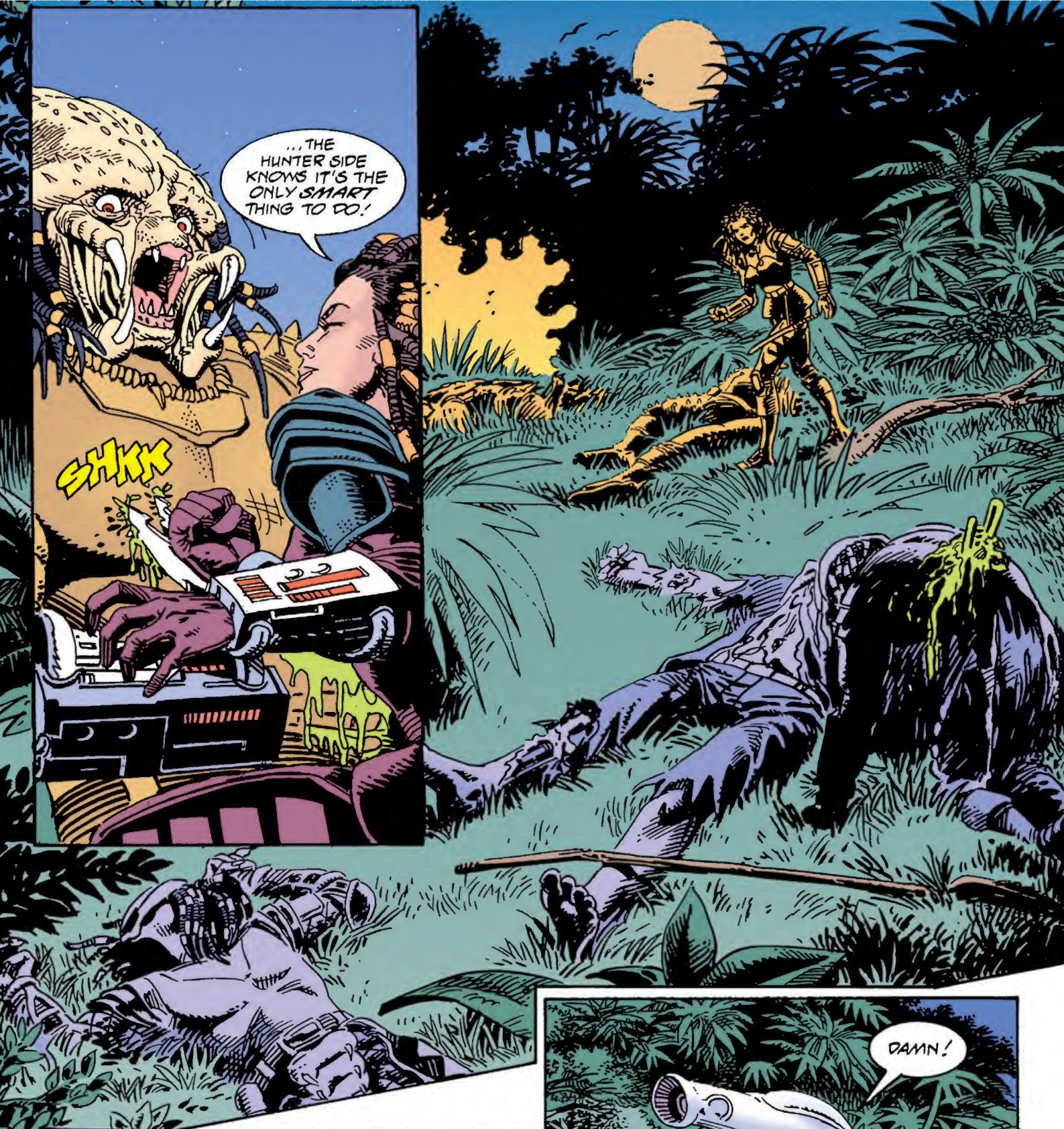
SLAK

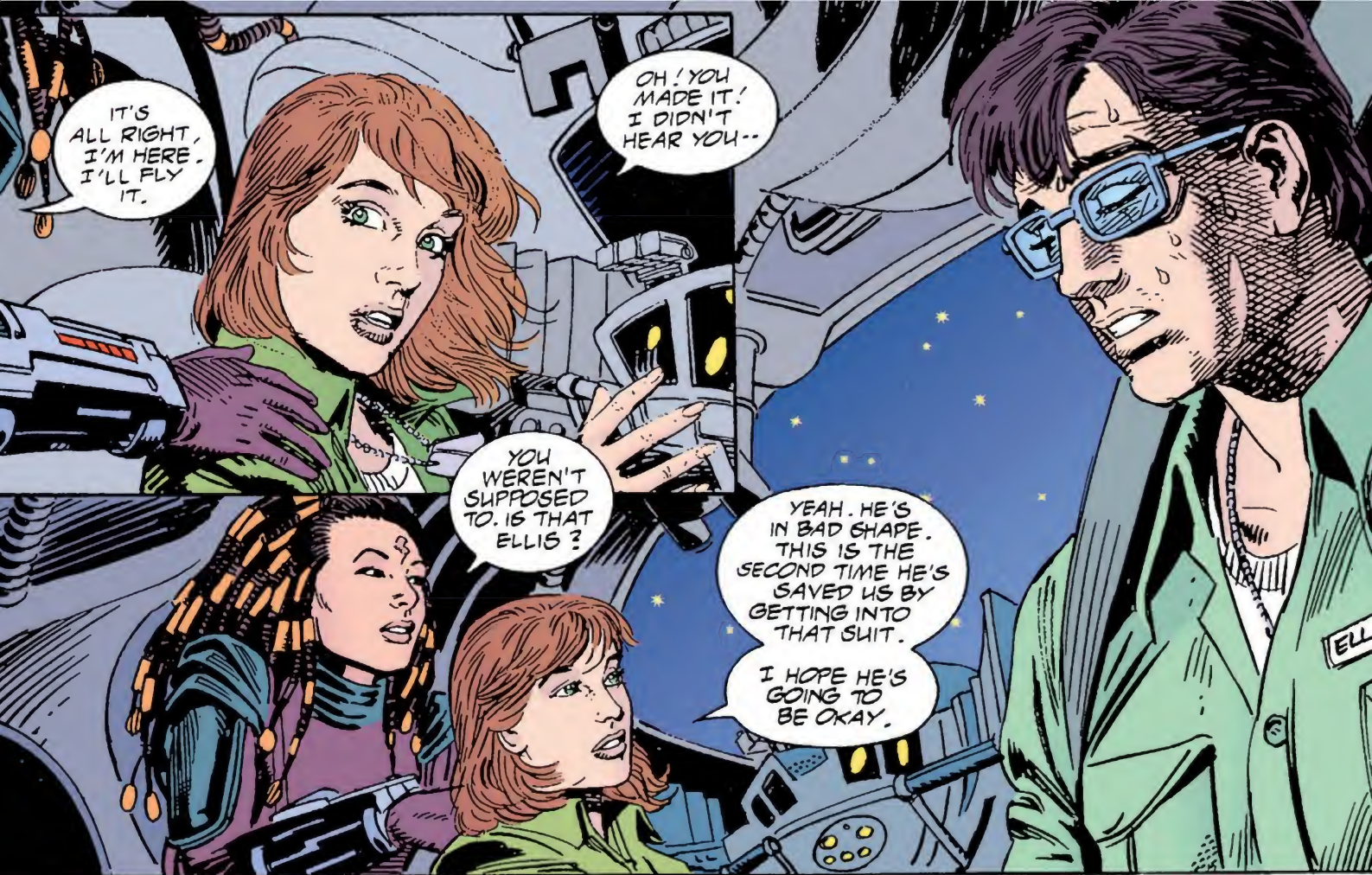


KAK
<HUMAN...>
KAK

I KNEW
YOU COULD
UNDERSTAND
ME. GOOD.

I MAY BE
HUMAN, BUT I'M
ALSO HUNTER.
AND EVEN
THOUGH THE
HUMAN SIDE OF
ME SAYS IT'S
WRONG TO
KILL YOU...





THAT
WOULD BE
BRIGGS... IN THE
MAX ARMOR. I
THOUGHT HE SHOULD
DO SOME GOOD
WITH WHAT
LITTLE TIME HE
HAS LEFT.



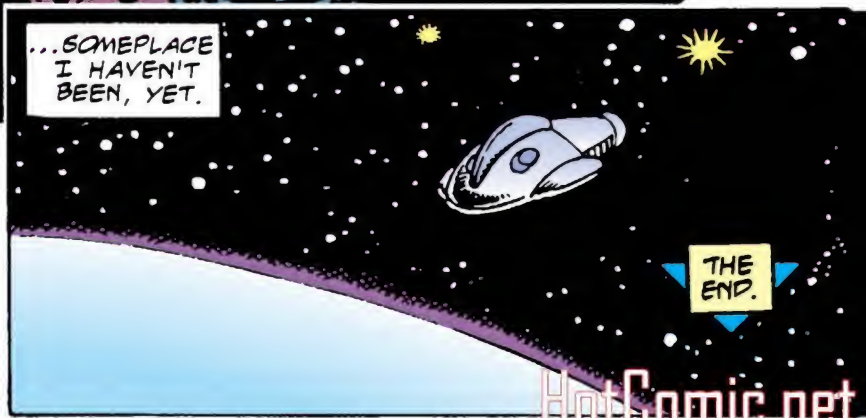
SO,
WHERE DO
WE GO FROM
HERE?

HOME,
OF
COURSE.



HOME...

...SOMEPLACE
I HAVEN'T
BEEN, YET.



THE
END.

ETERNAL



script
IAN EDGINTON

art
ALEX MALEEV

colors
PERRY McNAMEE / DARK HORSE DIGITAL

lettering
CLEM ROBINS

title illustration
GLENN FABRY




LIAR, THIEF, WHORE,
MURDERER. LI YAT SEN
IS ALL OF THESE--
THE LATTER MOST
RECENTLY.

PLAYING THE
WANDERING SAGE, HE
PEDDLED ELIXIRS AND
UNCTIONS TO DIM-
WITTED MOUNTAIN
VILLAGERS.

YET EVEN HE DIDN'T
ANTICIPATE HIS CURE--
ALL OF SNAKE BLOOD,
GINSENG, AND URINE
FERMENTING INTO A
TOXIC BREW.

SEVENTEEN
DIED...


...THE REST SMASHED
HIS CHEST LIKE PORCELAIN,
DROVE HIM OUT TO A SLOW
DEATH, BREATHING HIS OWN
BLOOD AS NIGHT AND COLD
CLOSED IN.



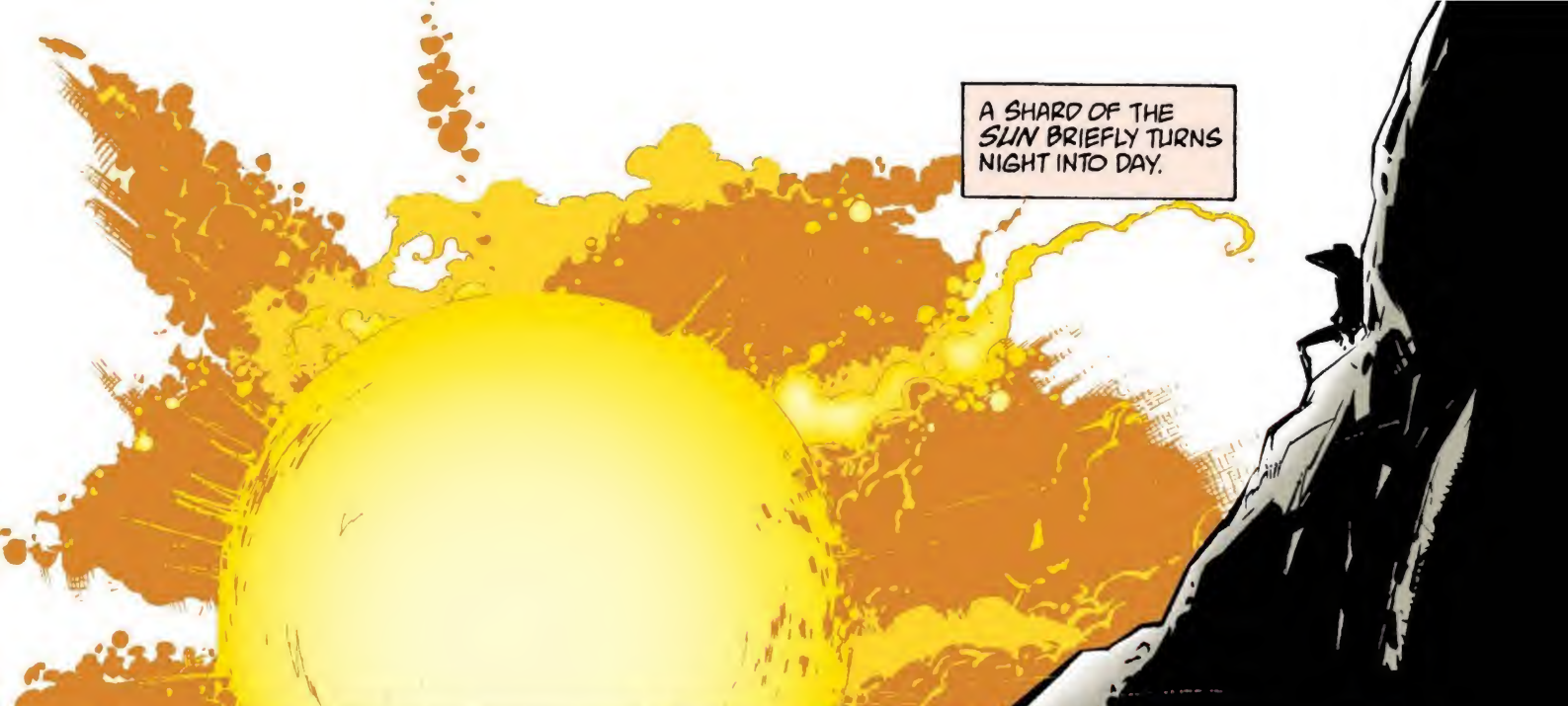
HE HAS LITTLE
TIME FOR THE
GODS. THEY'RE
FOR THE GULLIBLE,
THE PIOUS, AND
THE DYING.

YET, THROUGH BLOOD-
STAINED TEETH HE
PRAYS FOR DELIVERANCE.
IT NEVER HURTS TO
KEEP YOUR OPTIONS OPEN.


SUDDENLY
THE SKY CRACKS
AND SCREAMS...




...AND DESTINY
ARRIVES ON
BURNING WINGS.




A SHARD OF THE
SUN BRIEFLY TURNS
NIGHT INTO DAY.




IN THE VILLAGE THEY
COWER IN THEIR
BEDS, FEARFUL OF
THIS STAR OF ILL-OMEN.



YET, TO LI'S AGILE
MIND IT IS
SOMETHING MORE...



...IT IS AN
OPPORTUNITY.



ALIEN METAL HISSES
AND SPITS LIKE A VIPER
IN THE WHITE HEAT. IT
TOUCHES A MEMORY
IN LI OF A CAUTIONARY
TALE TOLD HIM AT HIS
GRANDFATHER'S KNEE.



OF DEATH AND
DRAGONS...



...AND MEN
WHO WALK LIKE
GODS.

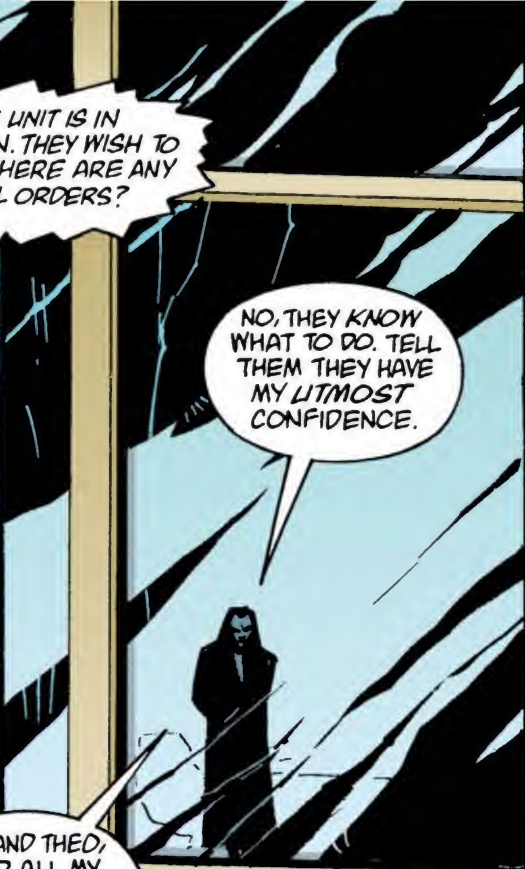


MISTER LEE... SIR?

YES, THEO?



THE UNIT IS IN POSITION. THEY WISH TO KNOW IF THERE ARE ANY FINAL ORDERS?

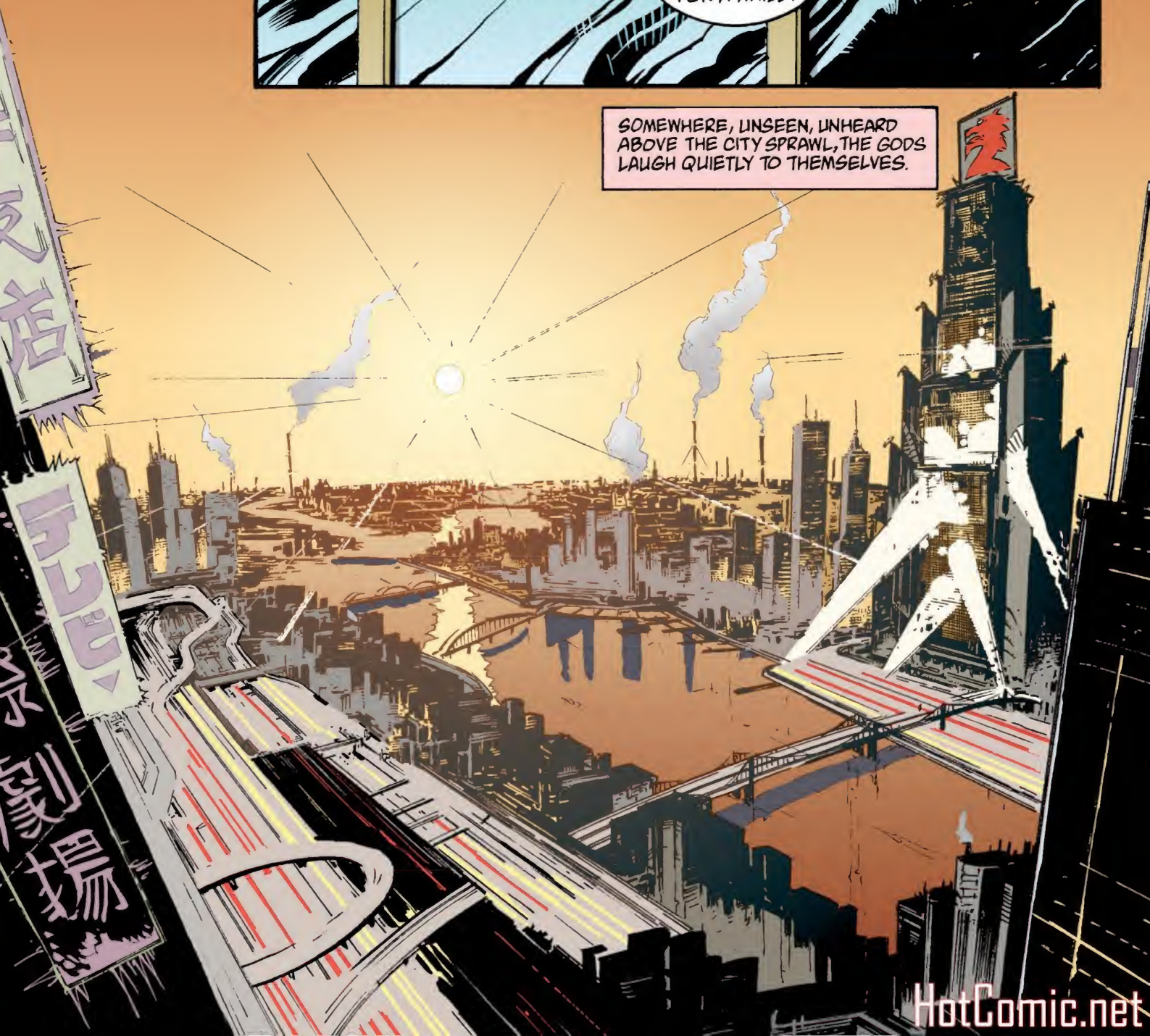


NO, THEY KNOW WHAT TO DO. TELL THEM THEY HAVE MY *LIT*MOST CONFIDENCE.



OH, AND THEO, HOLD ALL MY CALLS. I SHALL BE IN PRAYER FOR A WHILE.

SOMEWHERE, UNSEEN, UNHEARD ABOVE THE CITY SPRAWL, THE GODS LAUGH QUIETLY TO THEMSELVES.





THE SLAUGHTER-HOUSE OF WEST AFRICA. THAT'S HOW THE WORLD HAS COME TO KNOW THIS FORMER FRENCH COLONY OF GHAMIBIA.

SINCE ITS INDEPENDENCE THIRTY YEARS AGO, GOVERNMENT FORCES AND COMMUNIST REBELS HAVE FOUGHT A BLOODY CIVIL WAR.

UNSPEAKABLE ATROCITIES HAVE BEEN COMMITTED BY BOTH SIDES. BUT IT WAS THE MASSACRE OF FIFTY AID WORKERS AND JOURNALISTS TEN YEARS AGO THAT FINALLY SAW THE WEST WITHDRAW ITS AID.

NO NEWS TEAM HAS DARED VENTURE BACK INSIDE ITS BORDERS UNTIL NOW...



HOLD IT, EARL... THAT COULD BE HIM.





"IT IS... KEEP ROLLING."

"IN AN EXCLUSIVE REPORT, WE REVEAL PRINCE LAURENT MAKAEBA, GRANDSON OF FORMER KING FRANCOIS, HAS COME OUT OF EXILE IN BERLIN TO DO WHAT THE UNITED NATIONS COULD NOT..."



"...FORGE A LASTING PEACE IN THESE FIELDS OF FIRE."

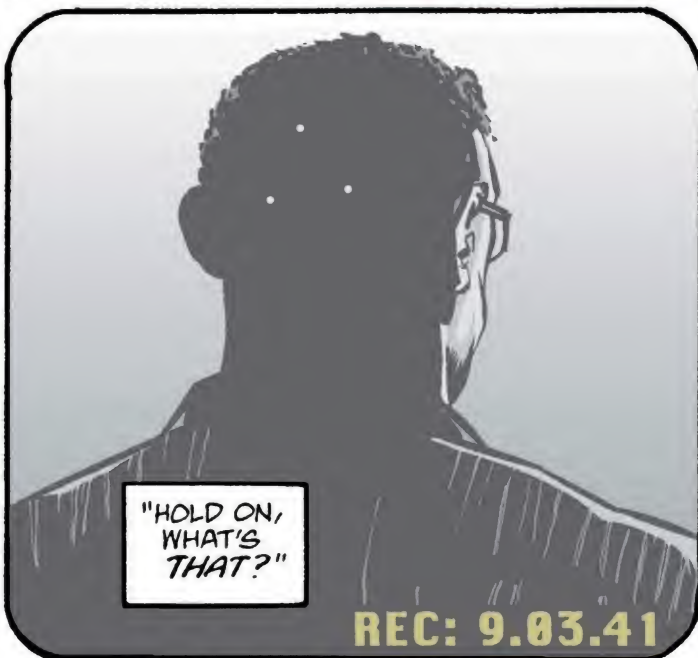
"THIS IS REBECCA MCBRIDE FOR THE INDEPENDENT NEWS NETWORK."



"OKAY, THAT'LL DO. I'LL GET A FEW WORDS FROM HIS HIGHNESS AND WE'LL HAVE ENOUGH TO UP-LINK BACK TO LONDON."

"THIS TIME TOMORROW WE'LL BE BLOWING OUR WELL-EARNED BONUS ON A SKINFUL DOWN THE PUB."

"CAN'T COME TOO SOON, NEITHER. THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE WILLIES AN' NO MISTAKE."



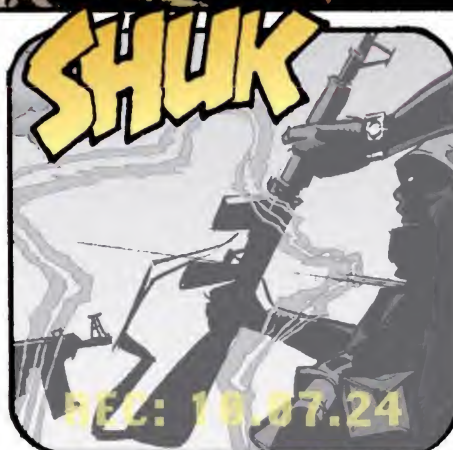
"HOLD ON, WHAT'S THAT?"

REC: 9.03.41



SHRAK!



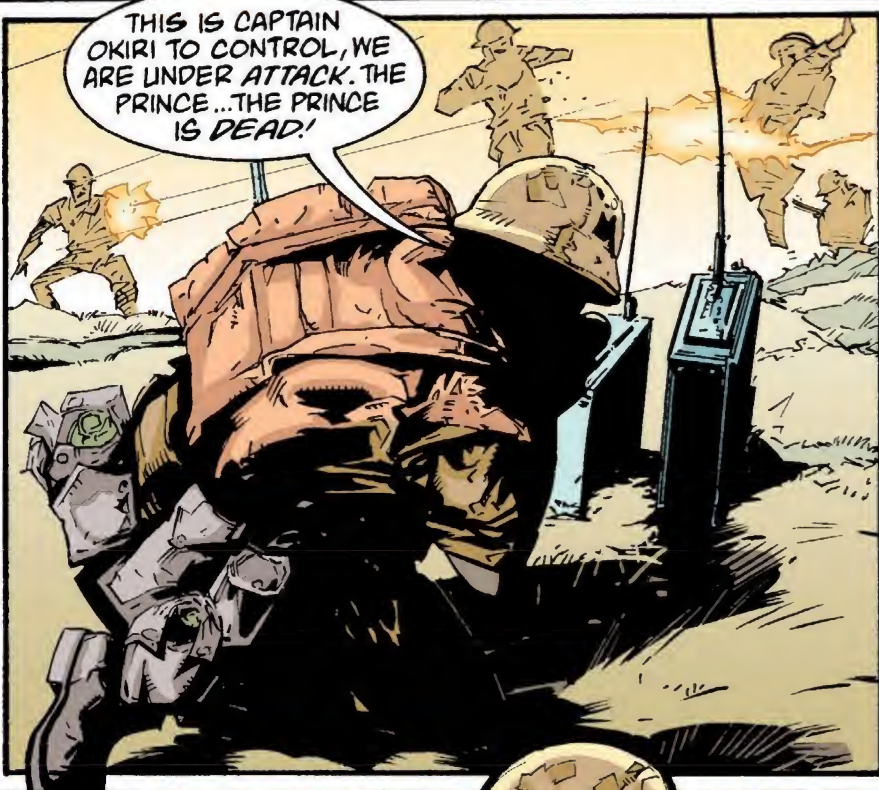


"IF I DIDN'T KNOW
BETTER, I'D SAY THESE
POOR BASTARDS ARE
BEING CUT TO PIECES
BY GHOSTS!"

SHRACK



THIS IS CAPTAIN
OKIRI TO CONTROL, WE
ARE UNDER ATTACK. THE
PRINCE...THE PRINCE
IS DEAD!



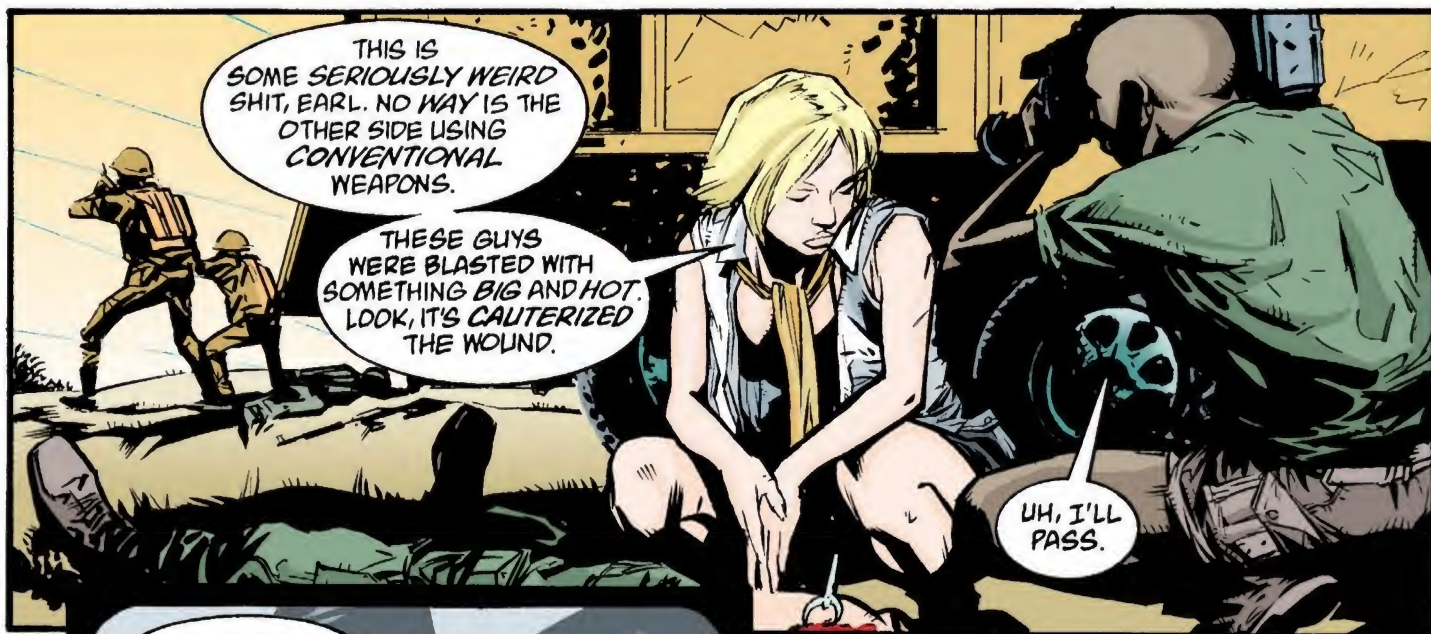
WE ARE **AMBUSHED!**
THE REBELS...SOMEHOW...I
DON'T KNOW...WE ARE BEING
WIPED OUT, **FAST!**
SEND REINFOR--



OH GOD

SLUTCH











"THREE MONTHS, MAJOR CABOT..."

...THREE MONTHS SINCE YOUR MEN DERAILED THE PEACE PROCESS IN GHAMIBIA, AND STILL THEY HAVE NOT MADE AN APPEARANCE!

OH, SO IT'S MY FAULT THAT THEY'RE A NO-SHOW? COME ON, LEE, YOU KNOW HOW IT WORKS.

THE ENVIRONMENT HAS TO BE JUST SO TO LURE THEM OUT... HEAT AND CONFLICT, RIGHT?



OKAY, SO THEY HAVEN'T TAKEN THE BAIT SO READILY THIS TIME. THEY WILL, WE JUST HAVE TO BE PATIENT.



MAJOR, MY PATIENCE IS SHORT AND TIME THE ONE COMMODITY I NO LONGER HAVE THE LUXURY OF.



WALK WITH ME.

TEK



WHAT IS THIS?

MY LIFE.

YOU SEE, MAJOR, YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST I HAVE EMPLOYED TO HUNT THESE... PREDATORS, ON MY BEHALF.

I HAVE LONG KNOWN OF THEIR EXISTENCE, THE THINGS THAT HUNT MEN FOR SPORT.

THERE IS AN ANCIENT TALE, OF SUBOTAI, A NOBLE SAMURAI WHO BESTED A PREDATOR IN COMBAT, ATE ITS HEART IN TRIUMPH.

SUBOTAI WAS OVER TWO HUNDRED YEARS OLD WHEN HE DIED.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT TROPHIES, OR WAR, OR POWER, OR POLITICS. IT'S SIMPLER THAN THAT... ISN'T IT?

MAJOR, I AM THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS OLD. I HAVE BEEN THIRTY-EIGHT FOR THE LAST SEVEN CENTURIES. I INTEND TO STAY SO FOR MANY MORE.

PLEASE, FOLLOW ME...

"...IT'S TIME YOU HAD
THE FULL TOUR."

OH MY
GOD!

GOD, OR
INDEED GODS, THEY
ARE OF LITTLE
CONSEQUENCE TO
ME...OR RATHER
THEY WERE...

...UNTIL
I SAW THE
LIGHT.

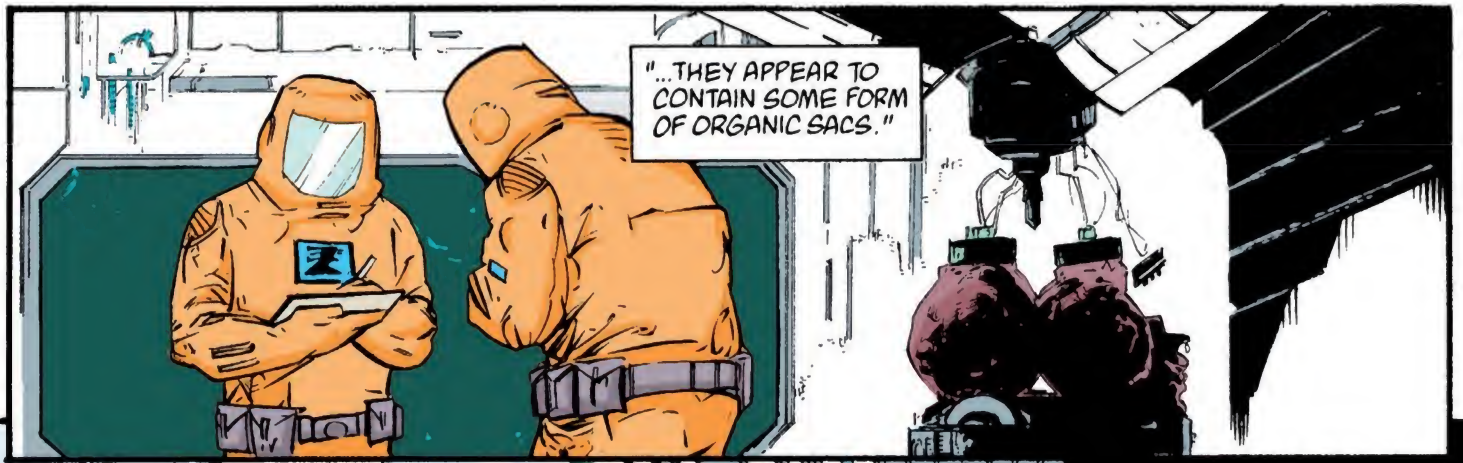
THIS, MAJOR,
IS A PREDATOR
SPACECRAFT. ITS
OCCUPANTS, THANKFULLY
DECEASED, SAVED MY LIFE.
ITS METALS AND TECH-
NOLOGY FURNISHED
ME WITH A
NEW ONE.

MY ENTIRE
FINANCIAL EMPIRE IS
FOUNDED UPON A MERE
FRACTION OF THE
COMMODITIES EXPLOITED
FROM THIS SHIP.

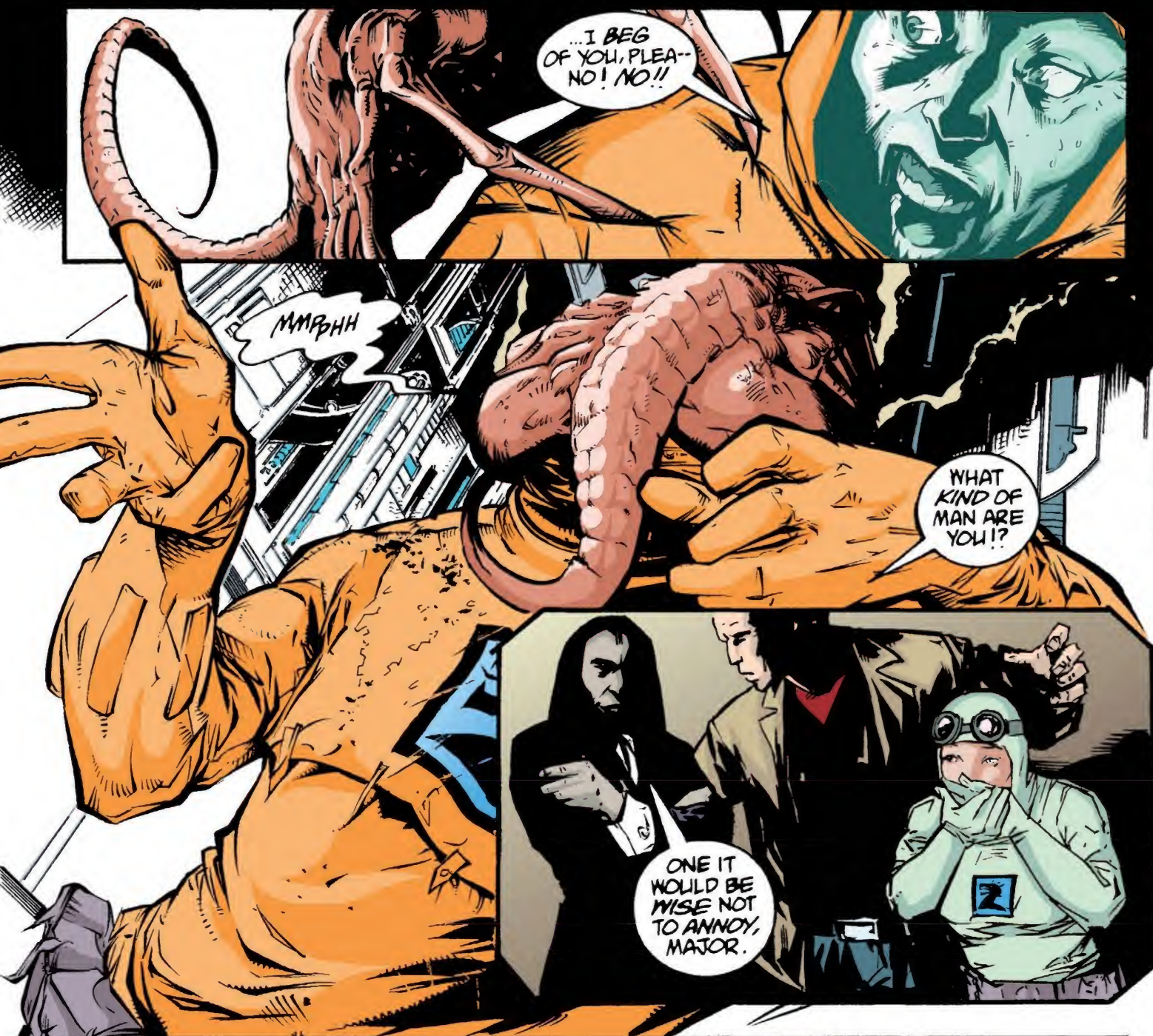
IT STILL CLINGS
TO SOME SECRETS,
BUT EVENTUALLY THEY
WILL ALL BE MINE.

DOCTOR
KISHIRO.

SIR, WE HAVE
JUST CRACKED THE
SHIP'S COMPUTER
LOCKING SEQUENCE
ON THE CARGO
POD...









"I THINK WE'VE ALL
HAD MORE THAN
ENOUGH EXCITEMENT
FOR ONE DAY."

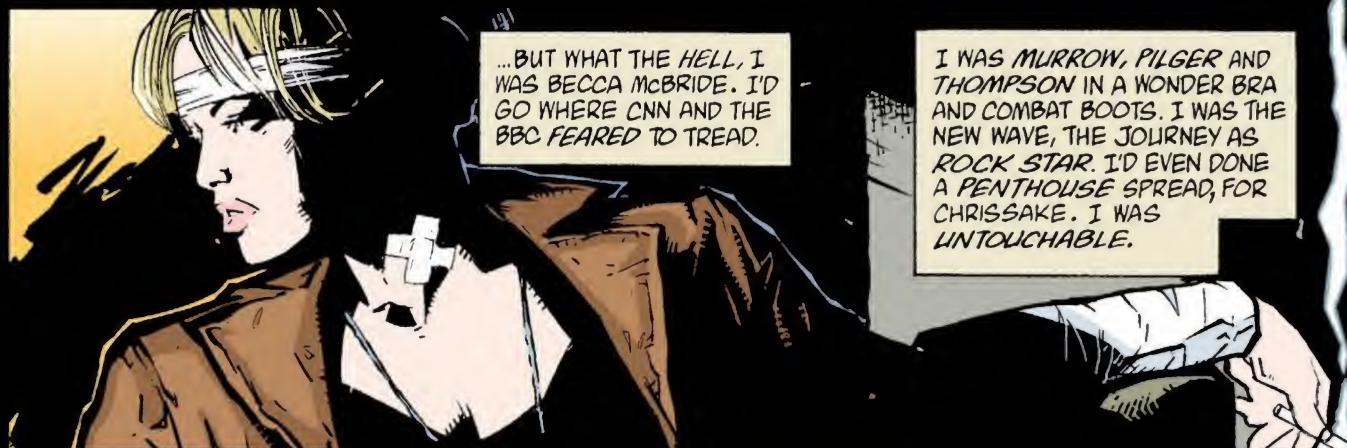
MY NAME IS REBECCA McBRIDE
AND MY LIFE IS SERIOUSLY IN THE
TOILET.

SEVENTY-TWO HOURS AGO I WAS
IN GHAMIBIA, A PIMPLE ON THE
ARSE OF AFRICA WHERE STARCHED
UNIFORMED PSYCHOPATHS SENT
BOY SOLDIERS TO BUTCHER EACH
OTHER FOR SOME CAUSE OR ANOTHER.
I DON'T THINK THEY REALLY CARED
WHICH.

ALL I CARED ABOUT WAS THE MAJOR
STORY THAT WAS BREAKING. THEIR
EXILED MONARCH HAD RETURNED TO
NEGOTIATE THE FIRST PEACE SETTLE-
MENT IN THIRTY YEARS, AND I WANTED IN.

MY CAMERAMAN, EARL, AND I
WERE THE ONLY NEWS TEAM
TO GET THROUGH. NO ONE
ELSE WOULD TOUCH IT.
THERE WERE TOO MANY
JOURNALISTS' BONES IN
THOSE KILLING FIELDS...





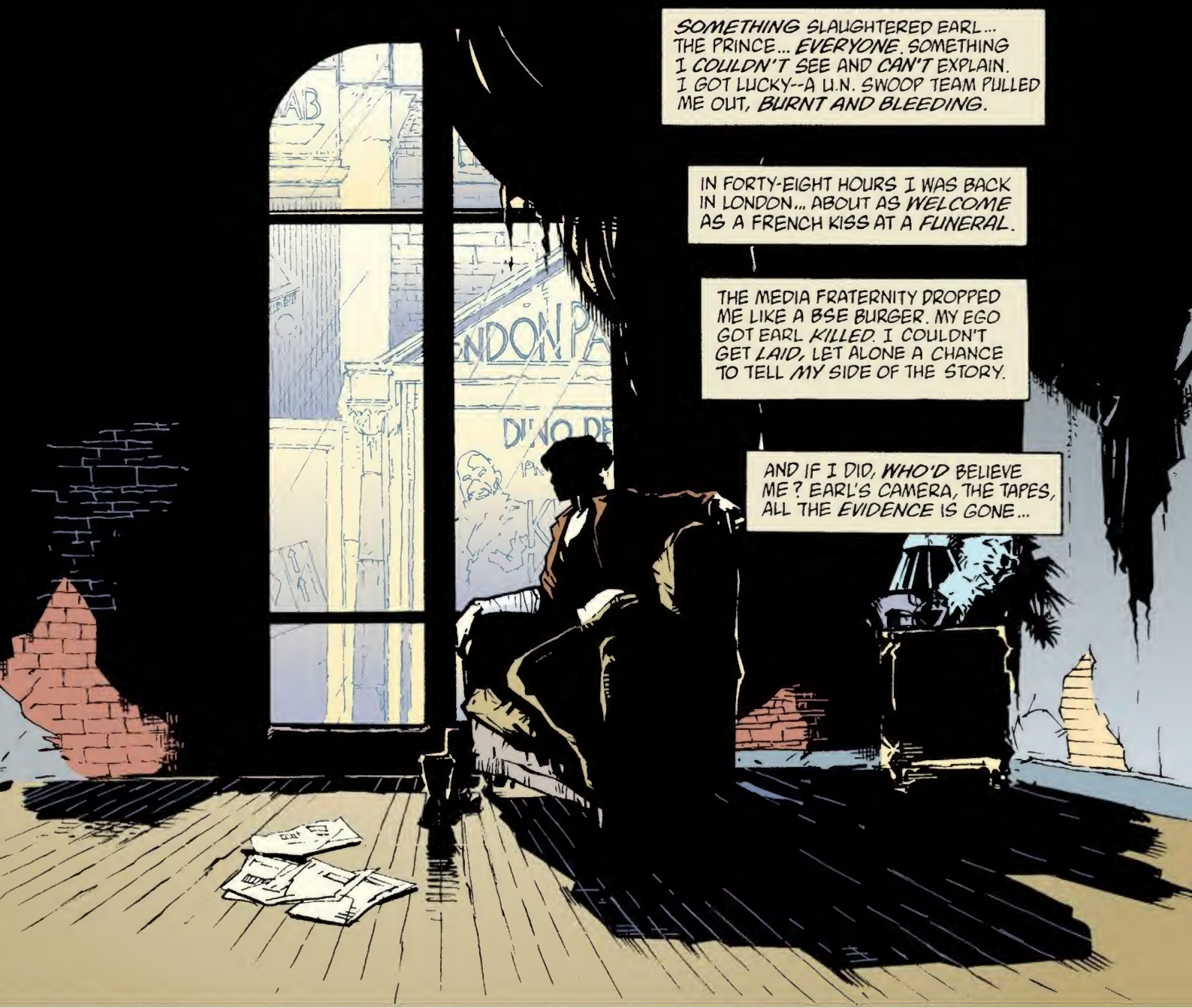
...BUT WHAT THE HELL, I WAS BECCA MCBRIDE. I'D GO WHERE CNN AND THE BBC FEARED TO TREAD.

I WAS MURROW, PILGER AND THOMPSON IN A WONDER BRA AND COMBAT BOOTS. I WAS THE NEW WAVE, THE JOURNEY AS ROCK STAR. I'D EVEN DONE A PENTHOUSE SPREAD, FOR CHRISSEAKE. I WAS UNTOUCHABLE.



YEAH, RIGHT...

...TAKE IT FROM ME, NEVER BELIEVE YOUR OWN PRESS.



SOMETHING SLAUGHTERED EARL... THE PRINCE... EVERYONE. SOMETHING I COULDN'T SEE AND CAN'T EXPLAIN. I GOT LUCKY--A U.N. SWOOP TEAM PULLED ME OUT, BURNT AND BLEEDING.

IN FORTY-EIGHT HOURS I WAS BACK IN LONDON... ABOUT AS WELCOME AS A FRENCH KISS AT A FUNERAL.

THE MEDIA FRATERNITY DROPPED ME LIKE A BSE BURGER. MY EGO GOT EARL KILLED. I COULDN'T GET LAID, LET ALONE A CHANCE TO TELL MY SIDE OF THE STORY.

AND IF I DID, WHO'D BELIEVE ME? EARL'S CAMERA, THE TAPES, ALL THE EVIDENCE IS GONE...

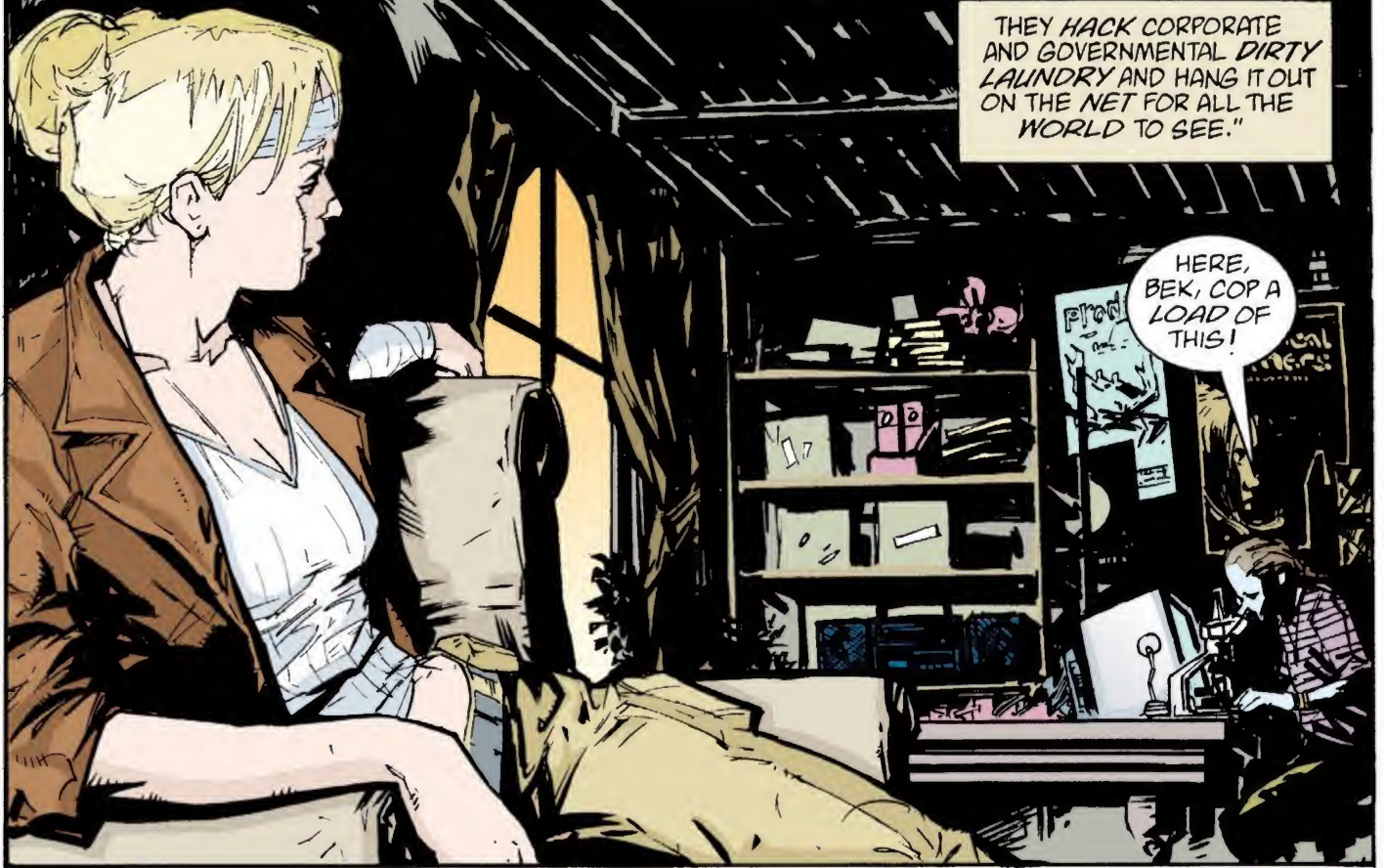
...WELL, NOT QUITE ALL.

THE PERSON OF *DUBIOUS* HYGIENE OVER THERE IS *CRAB*, A TECHNO-PAGAN IF YOU'LL EXCUSE THE CONTRADICTION. HIS *REAL* NAME'S JULIAN, AND HIS DAD'S A STOCKBROKER, BUT I DON'T LET ON I KNOW.

HE AND HIS *COUNTERCULTURE*, *ANARCHIST*, RICH-KID CHUMS ARE JUST A FEW OF THE WEIRD *CONTACTS* I'VE MADE OVER THE YEARS. THEY'RE INTO VEGANISM, SMART DRUGS, RAVING, AND BEST OF ALL, *TOTAL DATA ACCESS*.

THEY HACK CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENTAL *DIRTY LAUNDRY* AND HANG IT OUT ON THE NET FOR ALL THE WORLD TO SEE."

HERE, BEK, COP A LOAD OF THIS!

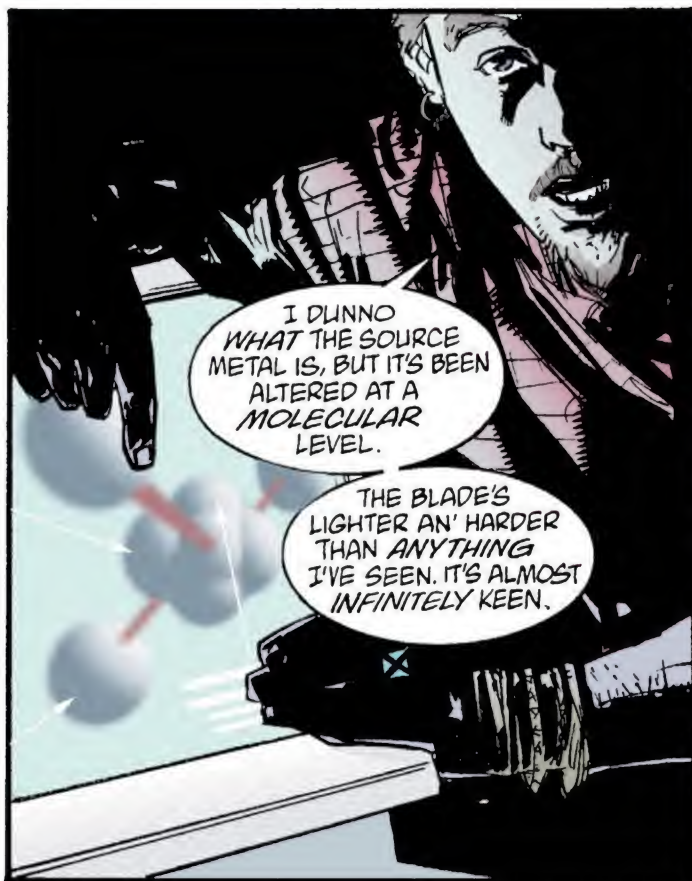


I DUNNO WHAT THE SOURCE METAL IS, BUT IT'S BEEN ALTERED AT A MOLECULAR LEVEL.

THE BLADE'S LIGHTER AN' HARDER THAN ANYTHING I'VE SEEN. IT'S ALMOST INFINITELY KEEN.

SO HOW DOES IT HELP ME?

I'VE POSTED THE SPECS ON THE NET. THERE ARE A FEW FOLKS WHO MIGHT KNOW WHERE THIS THING CAME FROM.





NOT BAD
FOR A HIPPIE
FLEABAG.

WE AIM
T'PLEASE. HERE'S
YOUR TOY. BETTER
KEEP IT SAFE.



BEEP!
YOU HAVE FOUR
MESSAGES.



BLOODY
HELL, THAT
WAS FAST.

NO. CRAP.
CRAP. AH, HERE
WE GO. SOME OTAKU'S
MATCHED IT TO A COUPLE
OF THINGS OF A SIMILAR
MOLECULAR
PATTERN.

THEY'RE
PARTIAL, PIRATE
SPECS FOR NEW
MILITARY
TECHNOLOGY,
THEY'RE...

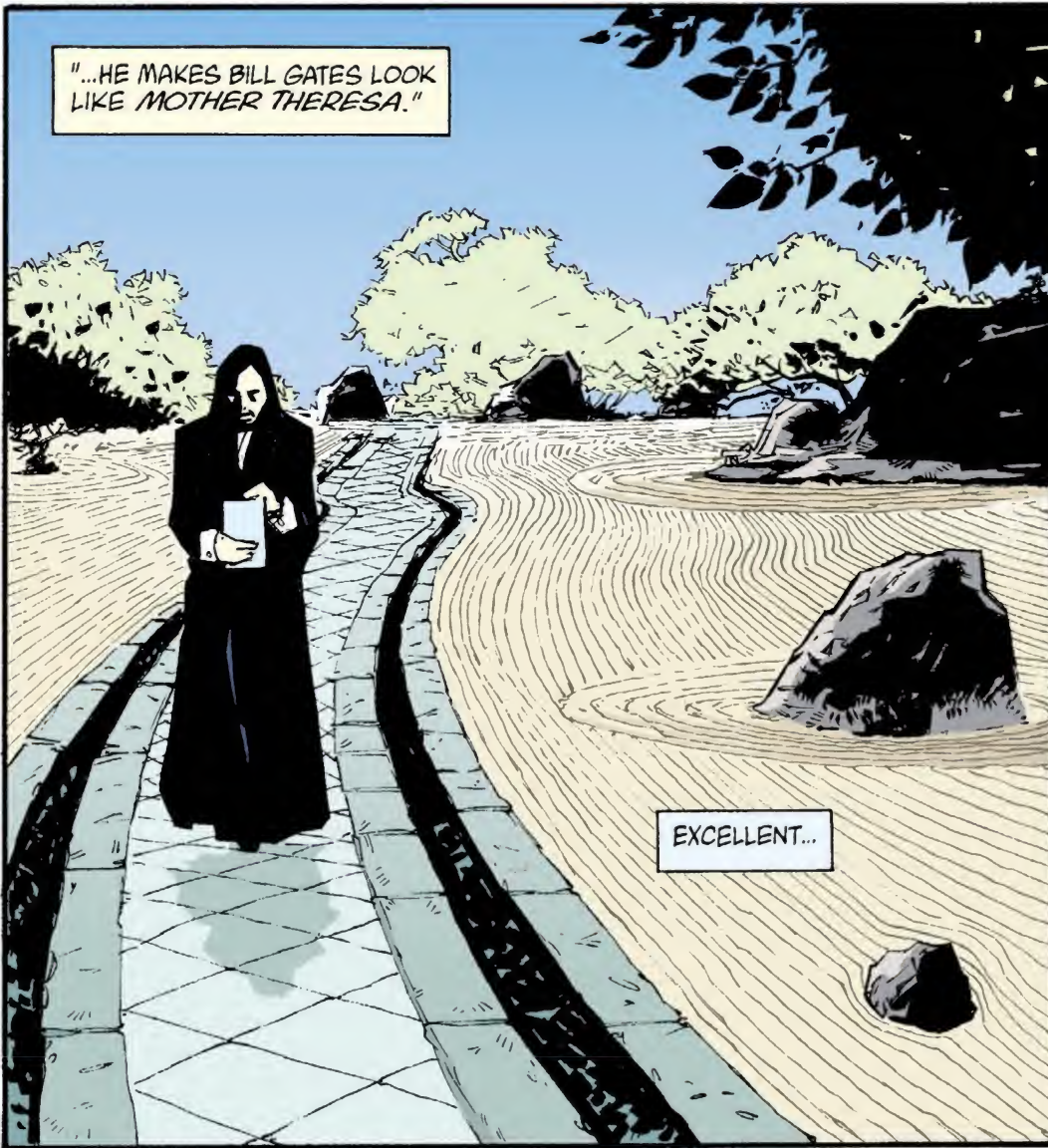


...OH,
BUGGER!

THIS IS SOME
LARGE TROUBLE, GIRL.
THE PARENT COMPANY BELONGS
TO GIDEON SUHN LEE.
NAME RING A BELL?

ONLY ABOUT
A MILLION. THERE'S
GIDEON LEE AND THEN
THERE'S GOD...

"...HE MAKES BILL GATES LOOK
LIKE MOTHER THERESA."




...WITH THE BUGS
FINALLY WORKED
OUT, WE CAN MARKET
THIS DISPOSABLE
COMPUTER IN
SIX MONTHS.



EXCELLENT...

THE SOFTWARE AND
PERIPHERALS ALONE
WILL MAKE ME YET
ANOTHER FORTUNE.







AND ALL THANKS TO
A MOST UNFORSEEN
TWIST OF FATE.




FATE
APPEARS TO
BE TWISTING
AGAIN BUT
THIS TIME
NOT IN MY
FAVOR.



I AM DYING. EACH
DAY I FEEL A LITTLE
MORE DEATH CREEP
INTO MY BONES.



I AM AFRAID, BUT
AFTER SO LONG I AM
USED TO THE FEAR
NOW. THIS IS NOT THE
FIRST TIME, NOR WILL
IT BE THE LAST. THE
SECRET IS NOT TO
FIGHT AGAINST
DEATH...



...BUT TO BEND
TO IT. TO ADAPT...



...TO SURVIVE.



MISTER LEE,
THIS IS DOCTOR KISHIRO.
PLEASE COME TO THE
CLINIC IMMEDIATELY.
IT'S TIME.

VERY WELL,
DOCTOR.



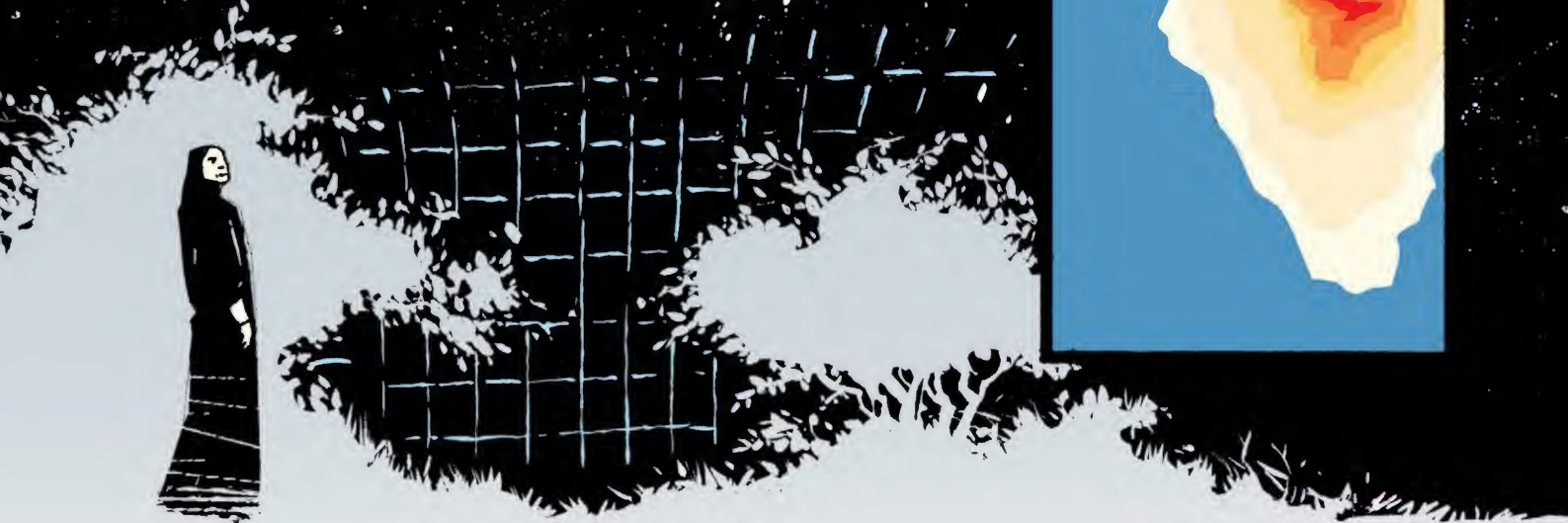
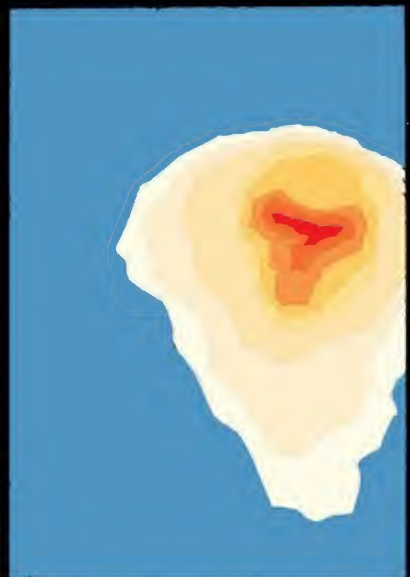
HAVE
MISTER
CABOT
JOIN US.

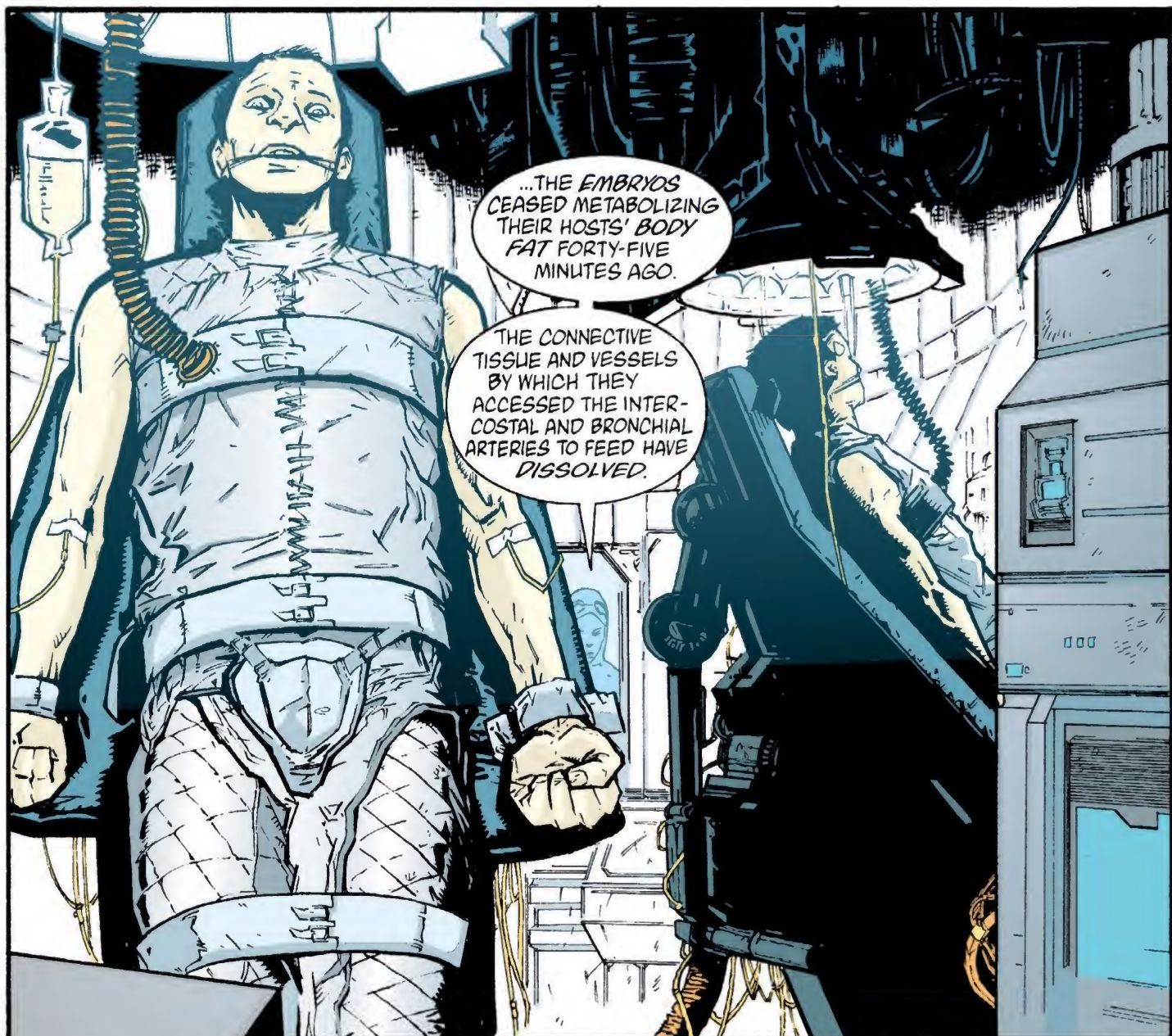
I AM OVER SEVEN HUNDRED
YEARS OLD, AND IN ALL THAT TIME
THE STARS HAVE BEEN THE ONLY
CONSTANT IN MY LIFE.

IT IS FROM THAT SOURCE THAT
MY IMMORTALITY SPRANG...



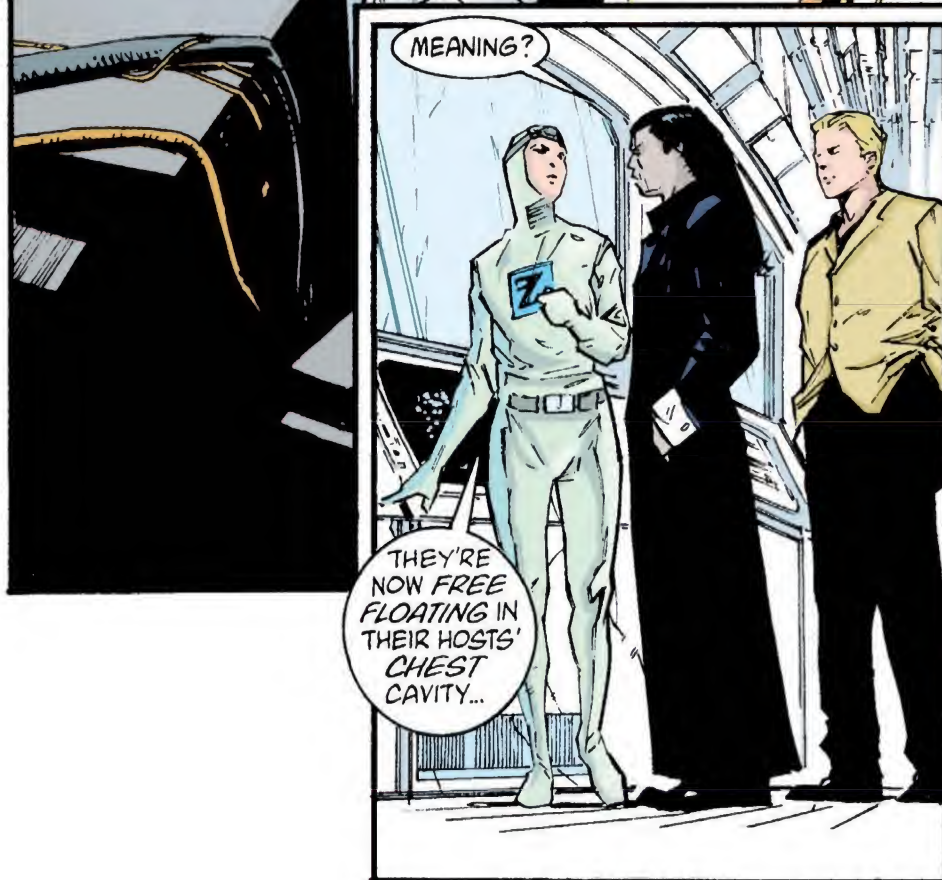
...AND IT IS TO THEM NOW THAT
I LOOK FOR IT ONCE MORE.





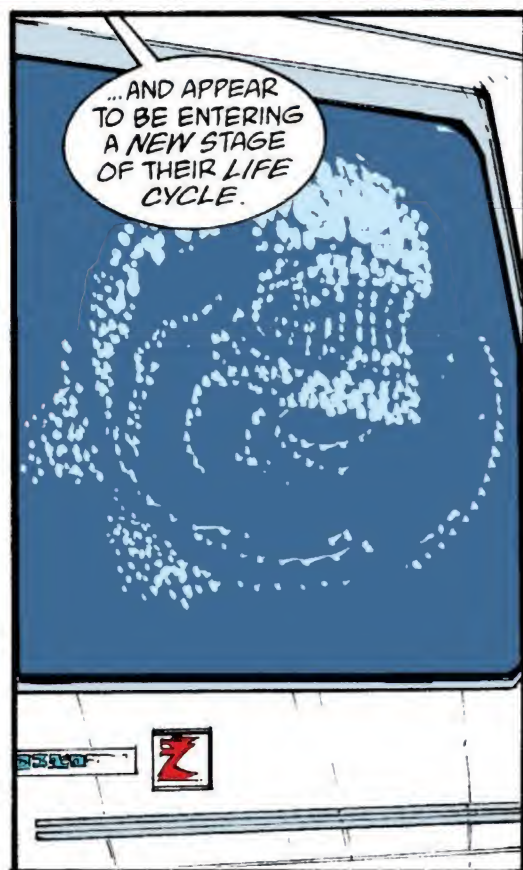
...THE EMBRYOS
CEASED METABOLIZING
THEIR HOSTS' BODY
FAT FORTY-FIVE
MINUTES AGO.

THE CONNECTIVE
TISSUE AND VESSELS
BY WHICH THEY
ACCESSED THE INTER-
COSTAL AND BRONCHIAL
ARTERIES TO FEED HAVE
DISSOLVED.

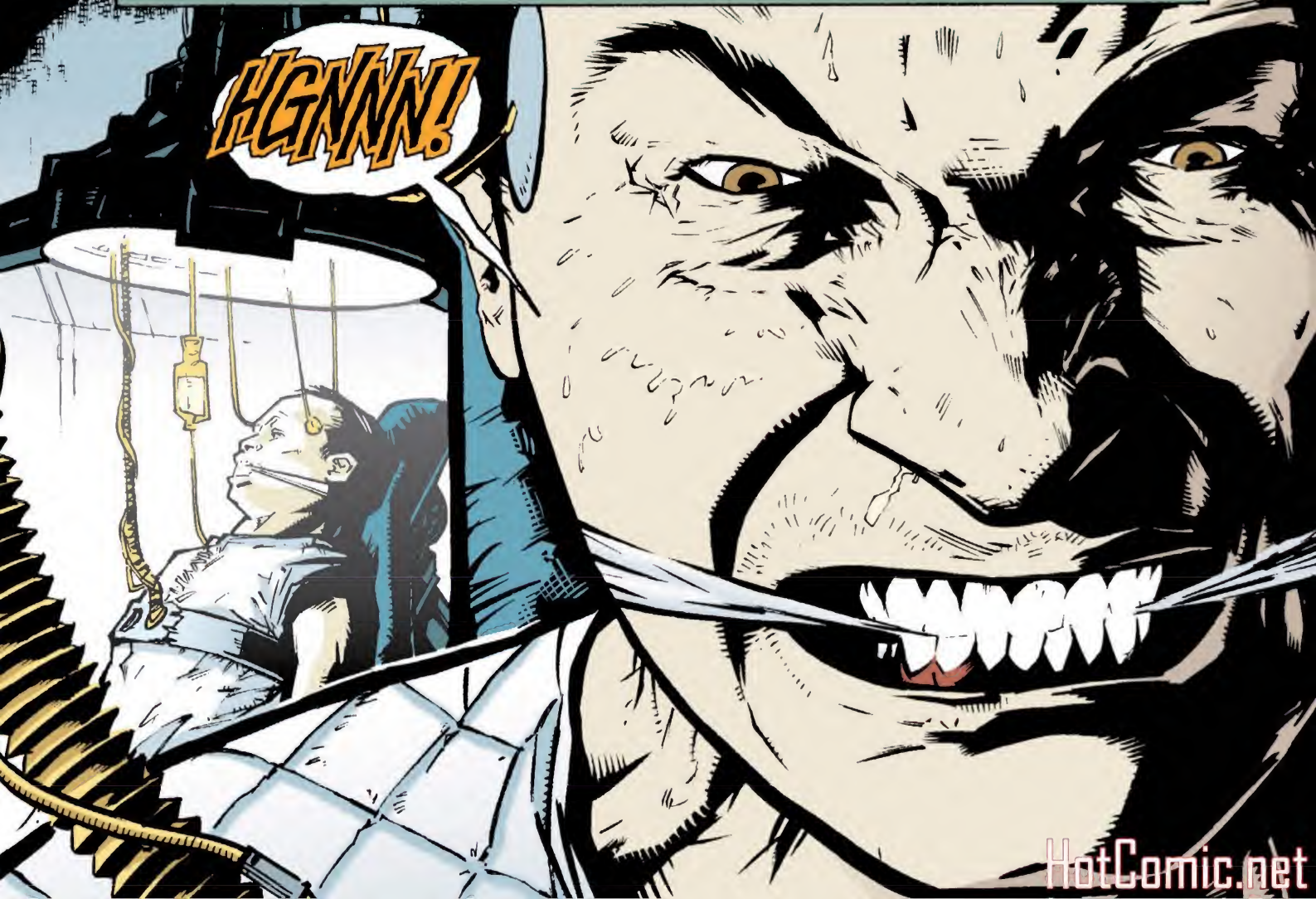
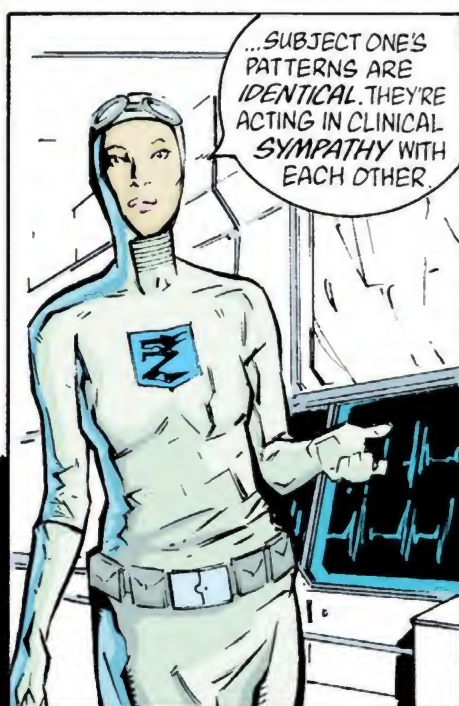


MEANING?

THEY'RE
NOW FREE
FLOATING IN
THEIR HOSTS'
CHEST
CAVITY...



...AND APPEAR
TO BE ENTERING
A NEW STAGE
OF THEIR LIFE
CYCLE.





THEY CAN'T
GET OUT OF THERE,
CAN THEY?

NO, ALL
BIOHAZARD
CONTAINMENT UNITS
ARE LINED WITH AN
ALLOY DERIVED FROM
THE PREDATOR
SHIP. IT IS
ALMOST IMPENE-
TRABLE.

ALMOST?



DOCTOR,
I AM NO
XENOBIOLOGIST,
BUT THESE DO NOT
STRIKE ME AS
BEING PREDATOR
YOUNG.



THEY ARE
CLEARLY ANOTHER
ALIEN SPECIES, ONE
THAT PRESENTS US WITH
A WHOLE OTHER WORLD
OF POSSIBILITIES.

WHO KNOWS
WHAT BY-PRODUCTS
THEY COULD FURNISH
US WITH.



KILL
THEM, LEE.
DO IT NOW!

YOU SAW
WHAT THEY DID,
AND THEY'RE STILL
ONLY YOUNG. GOD
KNOWS WHAT
THEY COULD
BECOME.

CALM
YOURSELF,
MISTER
CABOT.



I SUGGEST THAT
THEY ARE THE LEAST
OF OUR TROUBLES AT
PRESENT.



WHAT
D'YOU...
oh!



SONOVABITCH!





ARRE TARRETA!

SECURITY!
MOVE!
MOVE!



THERE'S NO
ONE HERE.

DUH! SO
WHO DID ALL
THIS?

SPREAD OUT, THEY'VE
GOT TO BE HERE
SOMEWHERE!

EISAKU!

GYAAH!!











"THEY'RE LEAVING."



WE JUST GOT VERY, VERY LUCKY.

DID YOU NOTICE THEY WERE LOOKING FOR THE EMBRYOS?



A FACT THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO TURN TO OUR ADVANTAGE.

I JUST KNOW I'M GOING TO HATE WHAT'S COMING NEXT.



I AM LIVING ON BORROWED TIME, MISTER CABOT-- BORROWED FROM THOSE ANIMALS. THEY ARE MY LIFE.

HUNT THEM FOR ME. KILL THEM FOR ME. BRING THEM DOWN AND I WILL GIVE YOU THE WORLD.


LONDON TO TOKYO, ECONOMY DIRECT.
IF IT'S NOT A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION,
IT BLOODY WELL SHOULD BE.

I ACHE IN PLACES I NEVER
KNEW I HAD, AND SMELL LIKE
A WRESTLER'S ARMPIT.

...BUT NOW
I'M HERE.

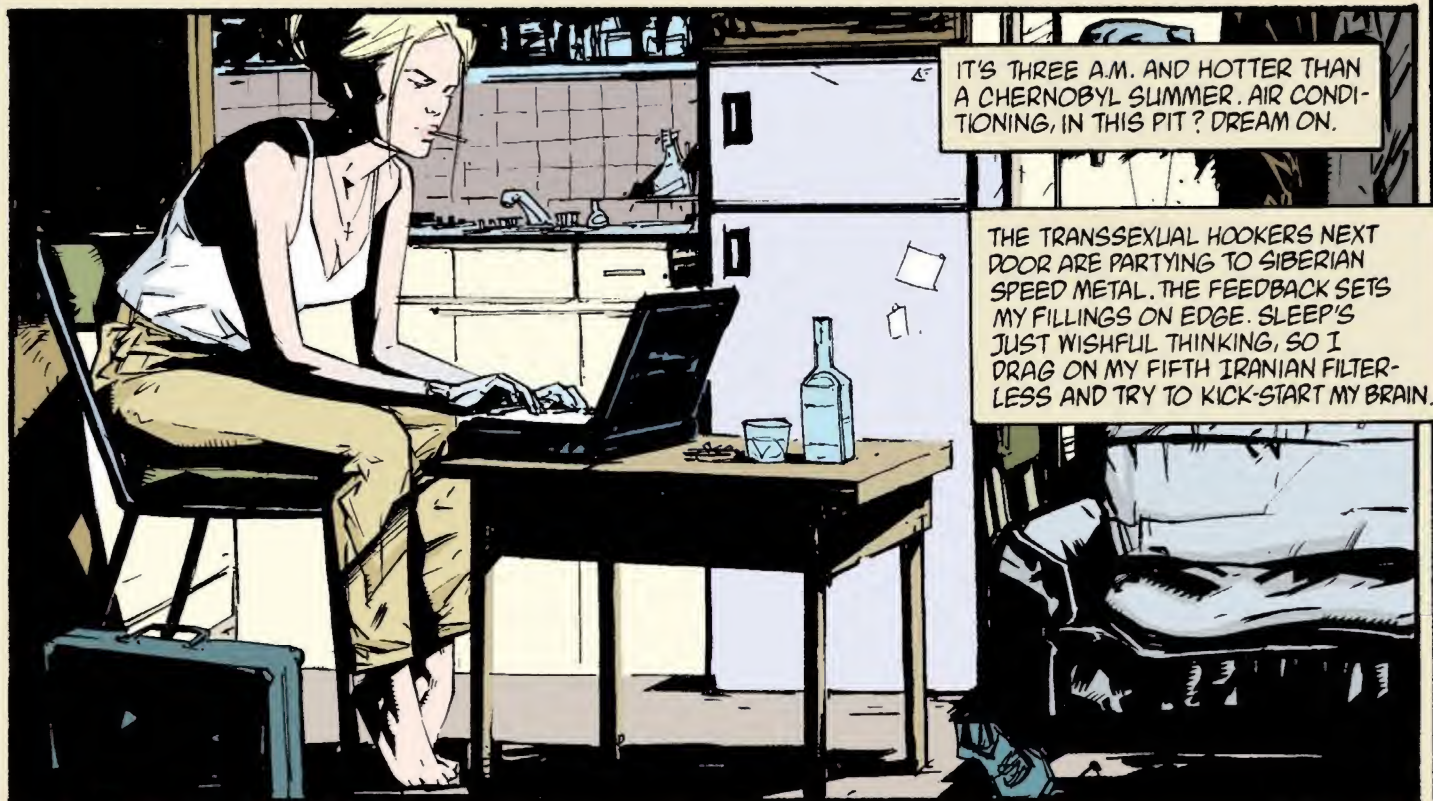
MY ONLY CONTACT
IS CRAB'S OTAKU
FRIEND LAZARUS.
WITH A BIT OF LUCK
AND A FLASH OF
THIGH, HE'LL HELP ME
DIG UP WHATEVER I
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
GIDEON SUHN LEE.

I'VE SOLD EVERYTHING
I OWN AND MAXED MY
CREDIT CARDS TO INFINITY...



I'VE COME HERE LOOKING
FOR *THE TRUTH*, AND I'M
GOING TO KICK OVER
EVERY STONE--LOOK
INTO EVERY DARK AND
NASTY CORNER UNTIL I
FIND IT.

EVEN IF IT
KILLS ME.



IT'S THREE A.M. AND HOTTER THAN A CHERNOBYL SUMMER. AIR CONDITIONING, IN THIS PIT? DREAM ON.

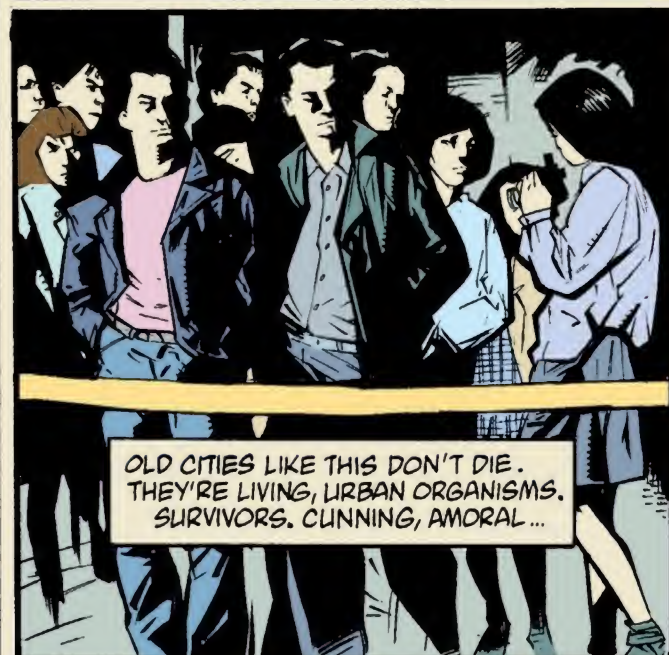
THE TRANSEXUAL HOOKERS NEXT DOOR ARE PARTYING TO SIBERIAN SPEED METAL. THE FEEDBACK SETS MY FILLINGS ON EDGE. SLEEP'S JUST WISHFUL THINKING, SO I DRAG ON MY FIFTH IRANIAN FILTER-LESS AND TRY TO KICK-START MY BRAIN.



WELCOME TO TOKYO.

I WAS HERE LAST IN NINETEEN WHEN THE PACIFIC ECONOMIC BUBBLE BURST. SALARY-MEN WERE COMMITTING SEPUKU ALL OVER. THE ONLY GROWTH INDUSTRY WAS IN INDUSTRIAL OFFICE CLEANERS.

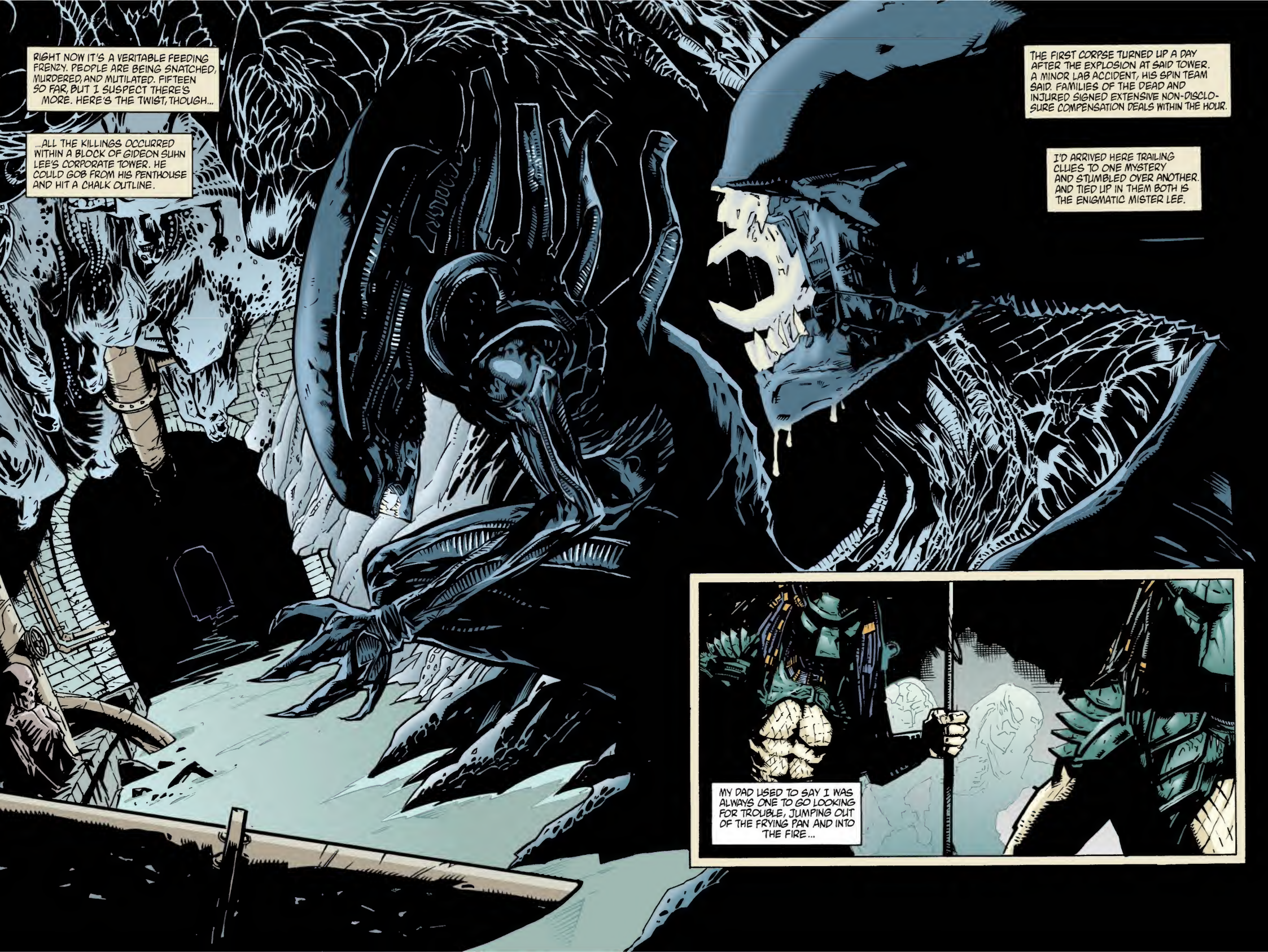
EVENTUALLY, INEVITABLY, THE COUNTRY CRAWLED BACK UP THE FOOD CHAIN AND REASSERTED ITSELF.



OLD CITIES LIKE THIS DON'T DIE. THEY'RE LIVING, URBAN ORGANISMS. SURVIVORS. CUNNING, AMORAL ...



...AND OCCASIONALLY THEY EAT THEIR YOUNG.




RIGHT NOW IT'S A VERITABLE FEEDING FRENZY. PEOPLE ARE BEING SNATCHED, MURDERED, AND MUTILATED. FIFTEEN SO FAR, BUT I SUSPECT THERE'S MORE. HERE'S THE TWIST, THOUGH...

...ALL THE KILLINGS OCCURRED WITHIN A BLOCK OF GIDEON SUHN LEE'S CORPORATE TOWER. HE COULD GOB FROM HIS PENTHOUSE AND HIT A CHALK OUTLINE.

THE FIRST CORPSE TURNED UP A DAY AFTER THE EXPLOSION AT SAID TOWER. A MINOR LAB ACCIDENT, HIS SPIN TEAM SAID. FAMILIES OF THE DEAD AND INJURED SIGNED EXTENSIVE NON-DISCLOSURE COMPENSATION DEALS WITHIN THE HOUR.

I'D ARRIVED HERE TRAILING CLUES TO ONE MYSTERY AND STUMBLED OVER ANOTHER. AND TIED UP IN THEM BOTH IS THE ENIGMATIC MISTER LEE.



MY DAD USED TO SAY I WAS ALWAYS ONE TO GO LOOKING FOR TROUBLE, JUMPING OUT OF THE FRYING PAN AND INTO THE FIRE...

...WELL, RIGHT ABOUT NOW,
IT FEELS LIKE SOMEONE'S
TURNING UP THE HEAT.





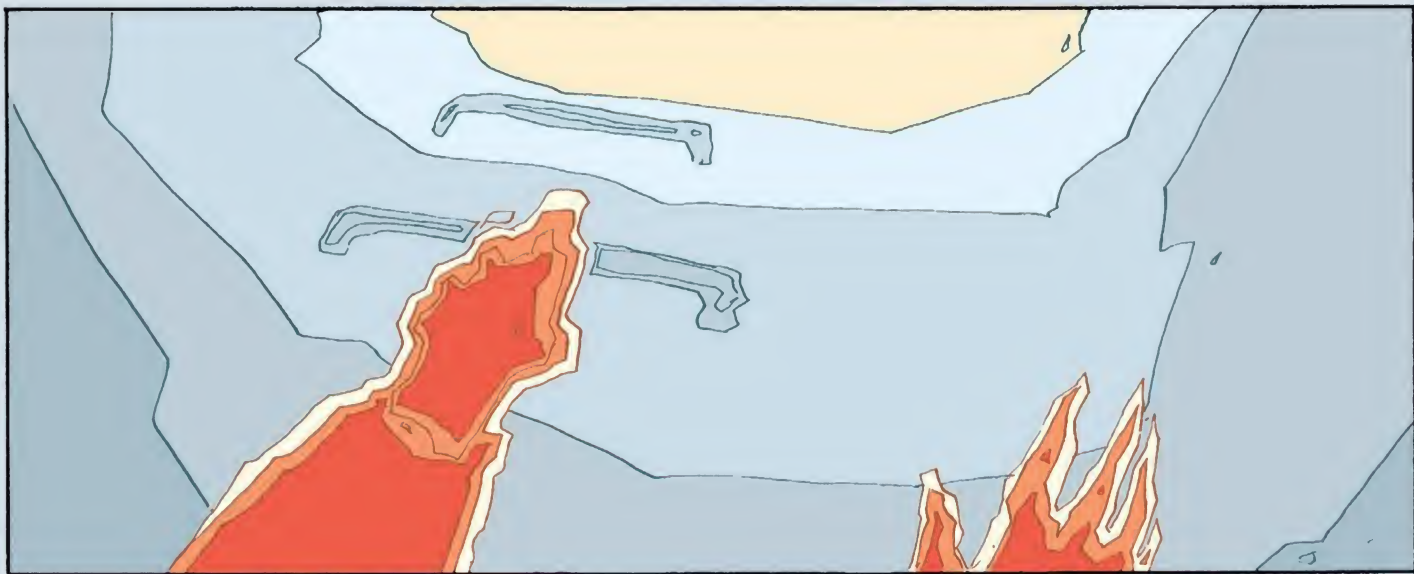
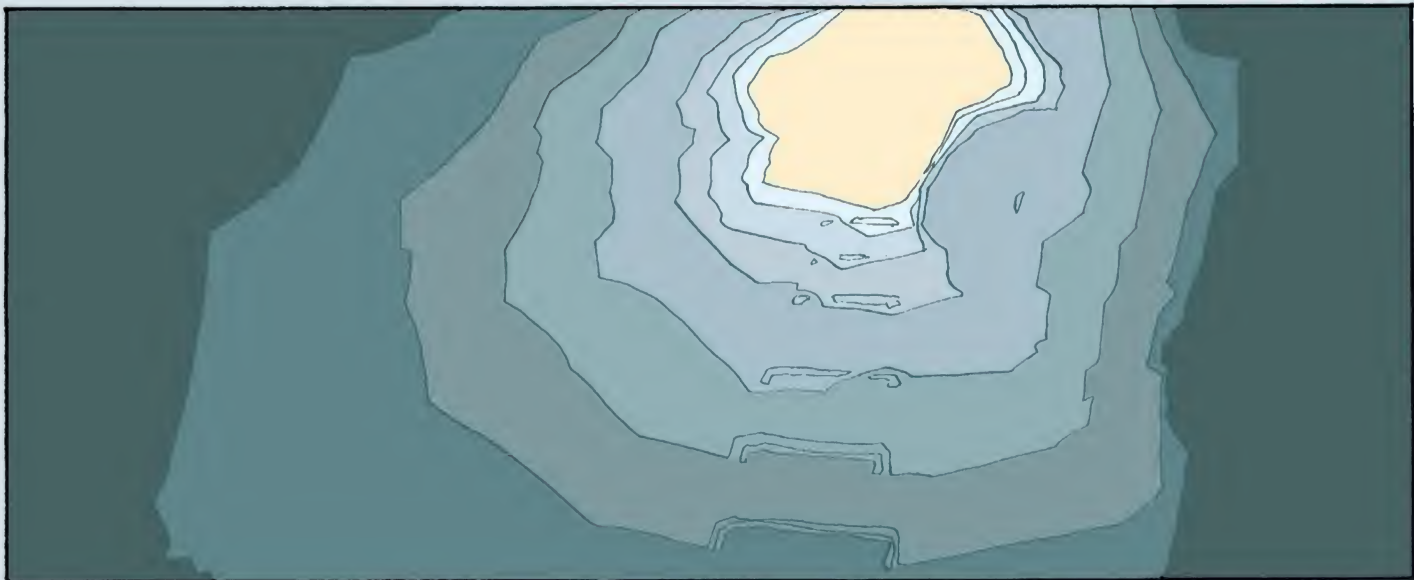


KRIIP

RRREEEE!

CLUD!









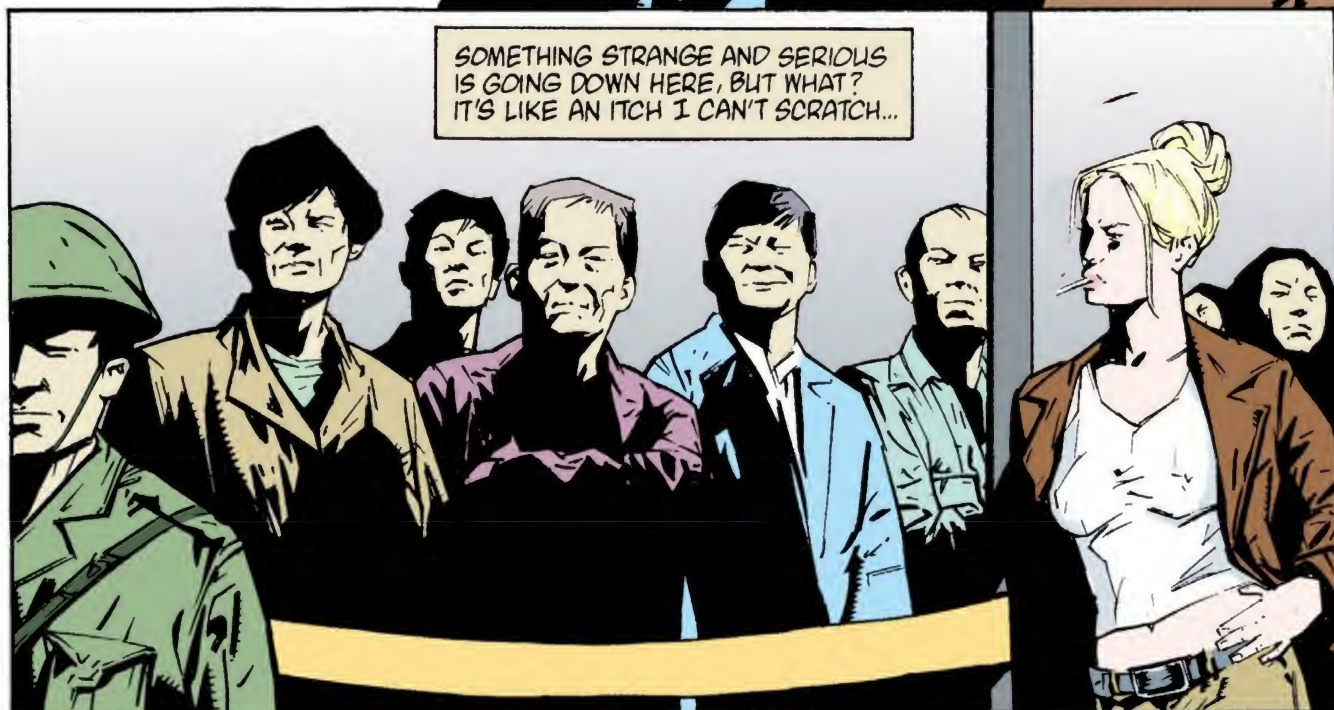




... SEEMS TO ME THEY'RE
GETTING A LOT OF THOSE
RECENTLY. IT LOOKS LIKE
A WAR ZONE.



BELIEVE
ME, I SHOULD
KNOW.



SOMETHING STRANGE AND SERIOUS
IS GOING DOWN HERE, BUT WHAT?
IT'S LIKE AN ITCH I CAN'T SCRATCH...



...AND I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE. THOSE GUYS ARE UNIT K, A COVERT WING OF THE JAPANESE SECRET SERVICE, AND THEY'RE NOT HERE FOR THEIR HEALTH.



MAYBE I'M BEING PARANOID, BUT IT SEEMS ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, ALL ROADS LEAD TO GIDEON LEE.

I'VE READ ALL THE AUTHORIZED PR STUFF, BUT IT'S WHAT'S NOT BEEN SAID ABOUT HIM THAT'S MORE INTRIGUING.



THERE'S NO DIRT, NO GOSSIP, NO SCANDAL, NOTHING. THIS GUY'S A CIPHER. HE PROTECTS HIMSELF WITH FEAR AND MONEY.

NO ONE I APPROACHED WOULD TALK. MADE ME START THINKING I WAS LOSING MY TOUCH...



...BUT THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A CAT.

REEP
REEP
REEP



OTAKU ARE DATA
FREAKS, OBSESSIVE
ACQUIRERS OF
USELESS INFO ON
SPECIFIC SUBJECTS:
JEWISH PORN
STARS, SPETNATZ
HANDGLINS, VANILLA
ICE, THE WOMBLES...

...LAZARUS LIKES SECRETS.
PERSONAL, INDUSTRIAL,
GOVERNMENTAL, YOU
NAME IT. THAT'S WHY
HE'S SO ANAL ABOUT
NOT MEETING. HIS
SECURITY'S HIS LIFE.

HE'S BEEN TRAWLING
FOR DATA ON LEE
FOR ME, AND IT LOOKS
LIKE HE'S FOUND
SOMETHING...

...SOMETHING HE
DOESN'T TRUST
SENDING VIA MODEM.
HE WANTS TO MEET!



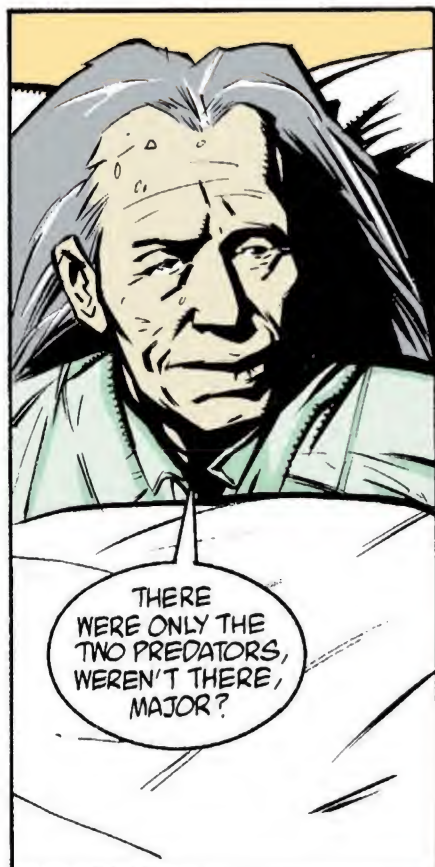
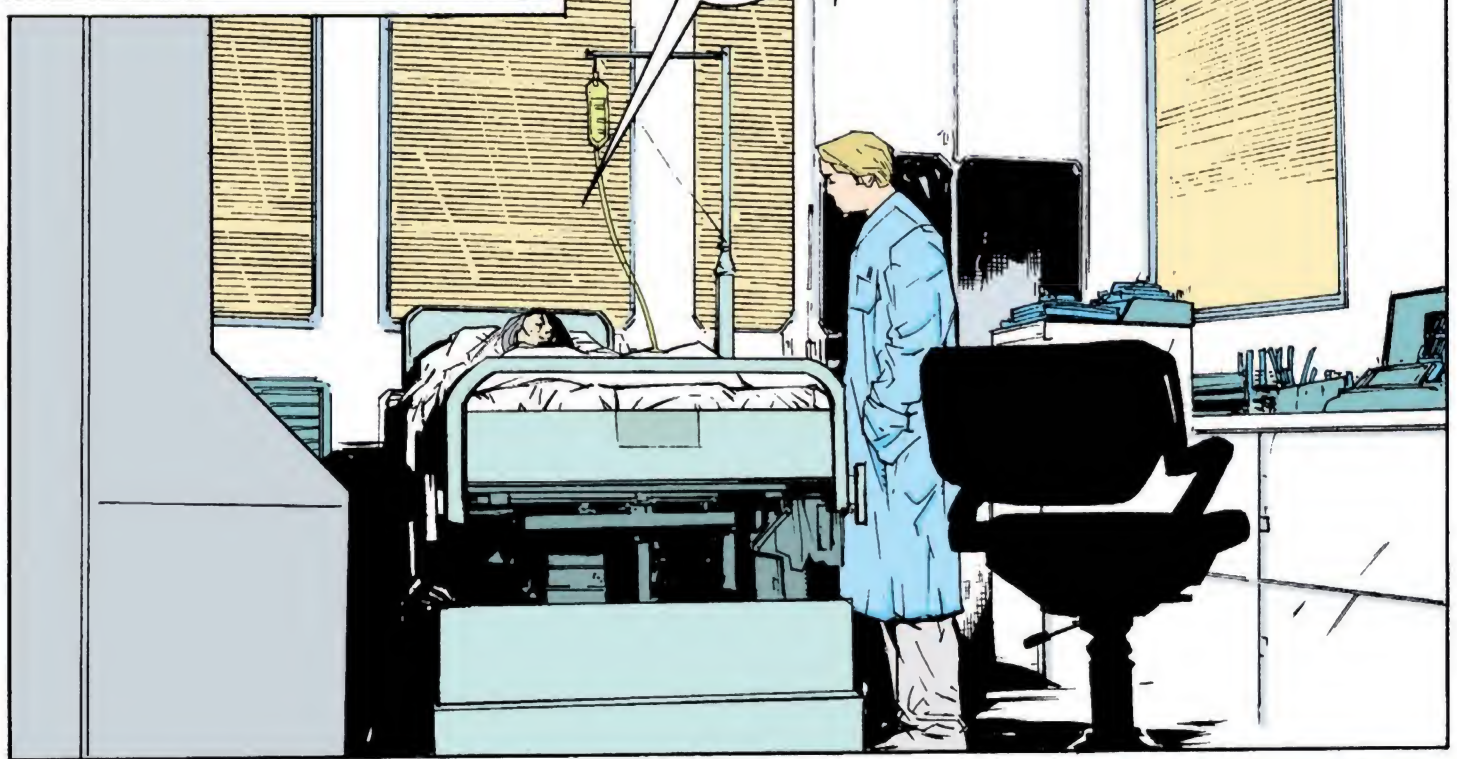
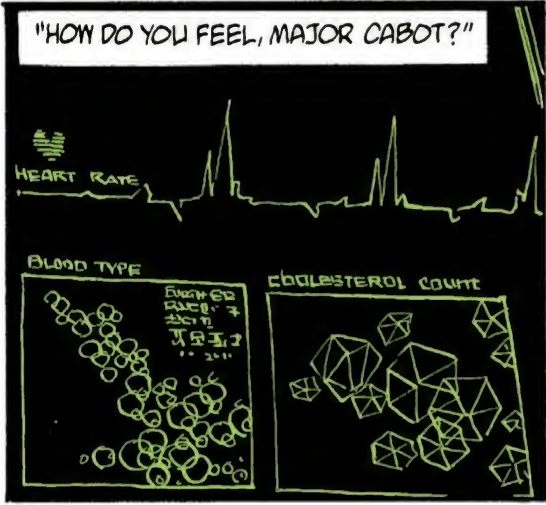
MY MATE CRAB'S FRIEND
LAZARUS HAS BEEN
DIGGING UP THE DIGITAL DIRT
FOR ME. HE'S LOCAL,
BUT WE'VE NEVER MET. LIKE
MOST OTAKU, HE'S PROBABLY
A GRUBBY AGORAPHOBIC
RAISED ON JUNK FOOD
AND TRASH TV.

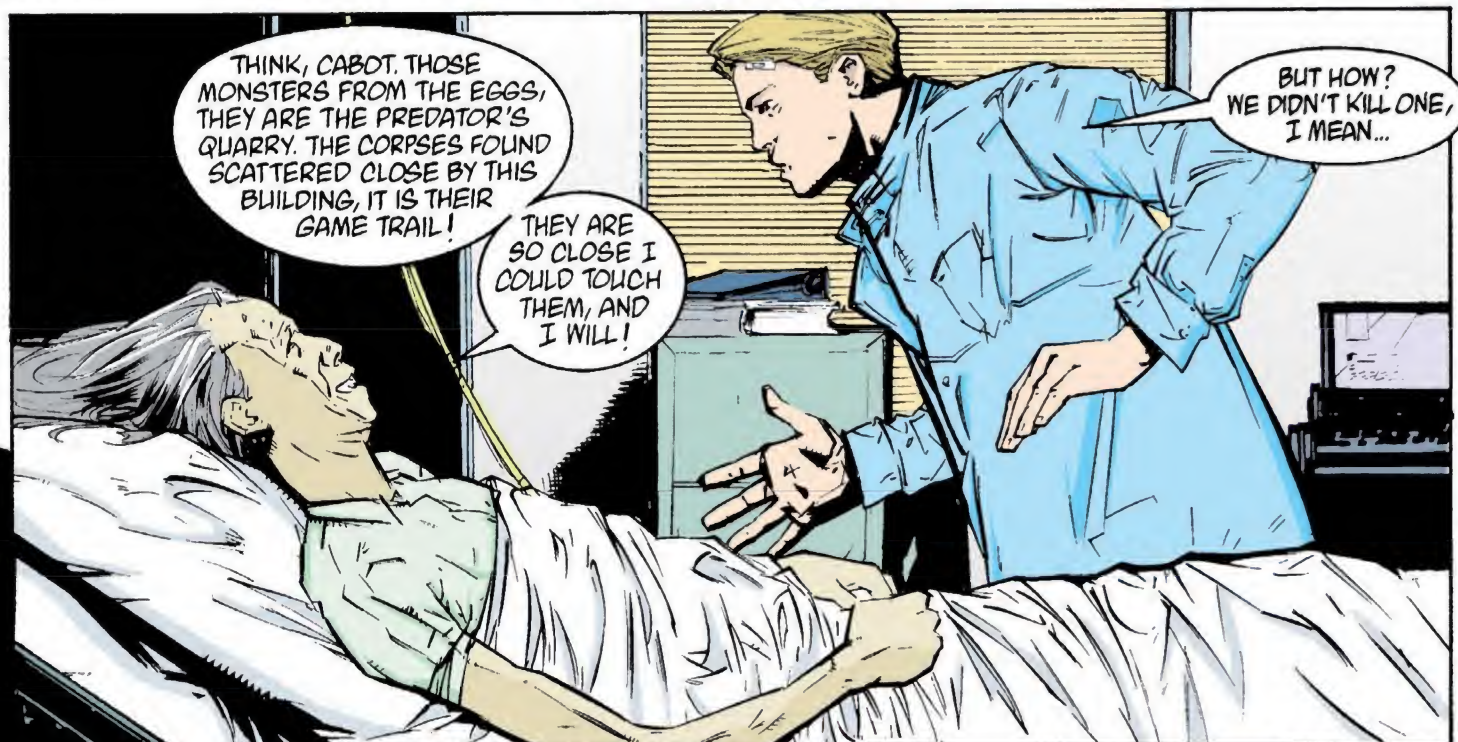
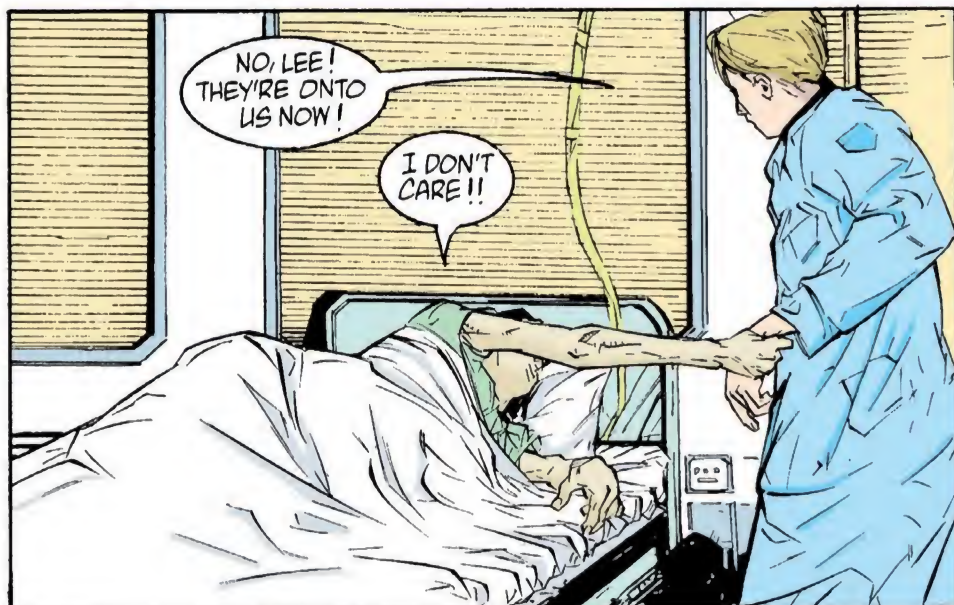
THEY'VE OPTED OUT
OF JAPANESE SOCIETY AND
ITS HELLISH WEB OF
SOCIAL LOYALTIES AND OBLIGA-
TIONS. THEY ONLY INTERACT
WITH OTHERS VIA COMPUTER.

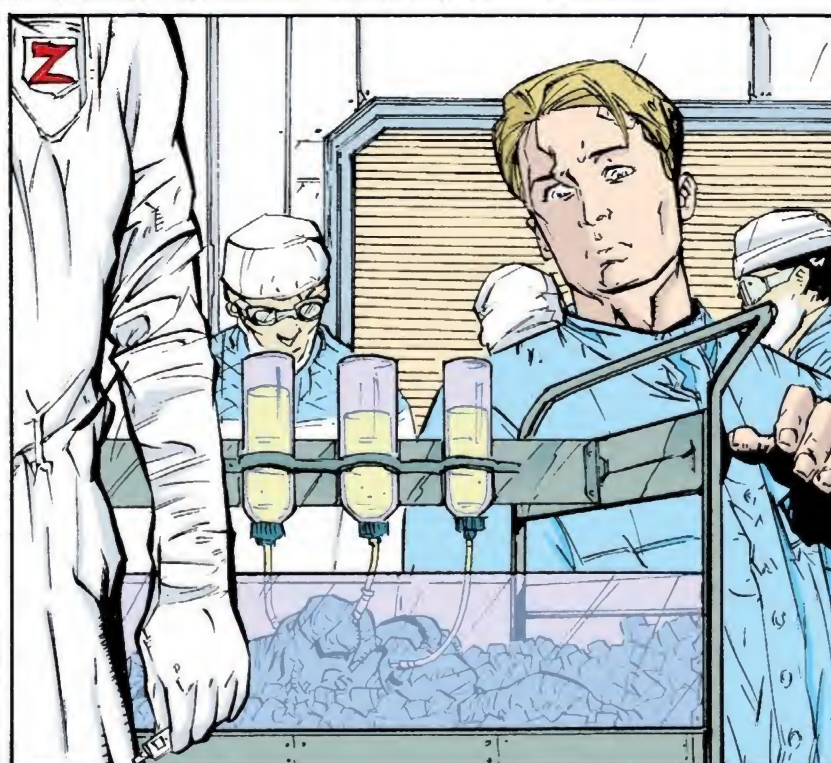
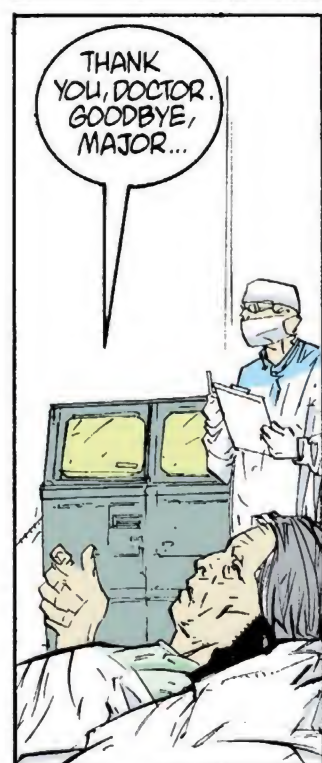
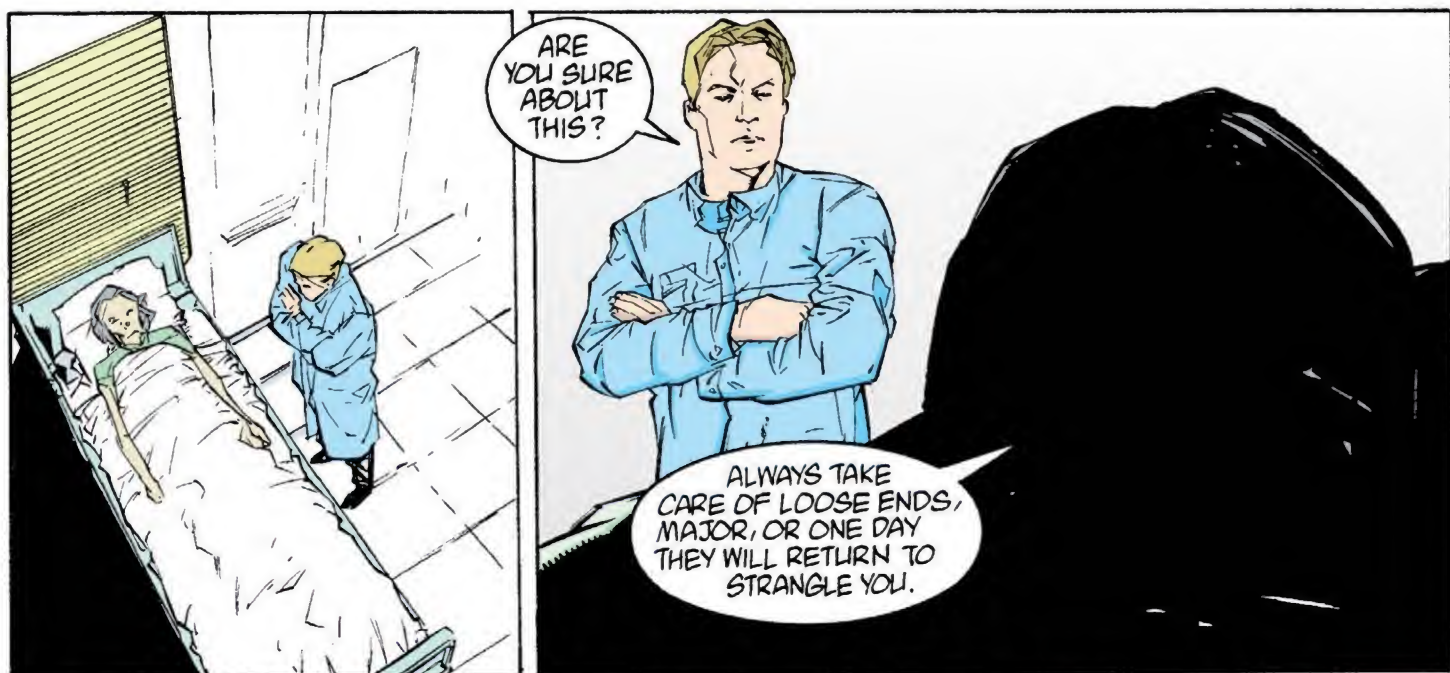
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY HERMITS.
ISN'T TECHNOLOGY MARVELOUS!
CHARLIE BABBAGE AND ALAN
TURING MUST BE SPINNING IN
THEIR GRAVES LIKE TOPS!



WHY DOES THAT
SCARE ME?











...ISS MCBRIDE? CAN
YOU HEAR ME?

YUSMFURKCHM

I'LL TAKE THAT
AS A YES. YOUR SEDATION
IS WEARING OFF. YOU'LL
FEEL SOME DISORIENTATION,
BUT IT'LL PASS.

NHHH... BOG
OFF, UGLY. I'VE
HAD WORSE
HANGOVERS
THAN THIS.

JUST FOR
THE RECORD,
BEFORE I KICK
YOUR TEETH IN.
WHERE AM I, AND
WHO ARE YOU?

YOU ARE A GUEST
IN MY HOME, MISS MCBRIDE.
I AM GIDEON SUHN LEE, BUT
YOU PERHAPS BEST
KNOW ME AS LAZARUS.

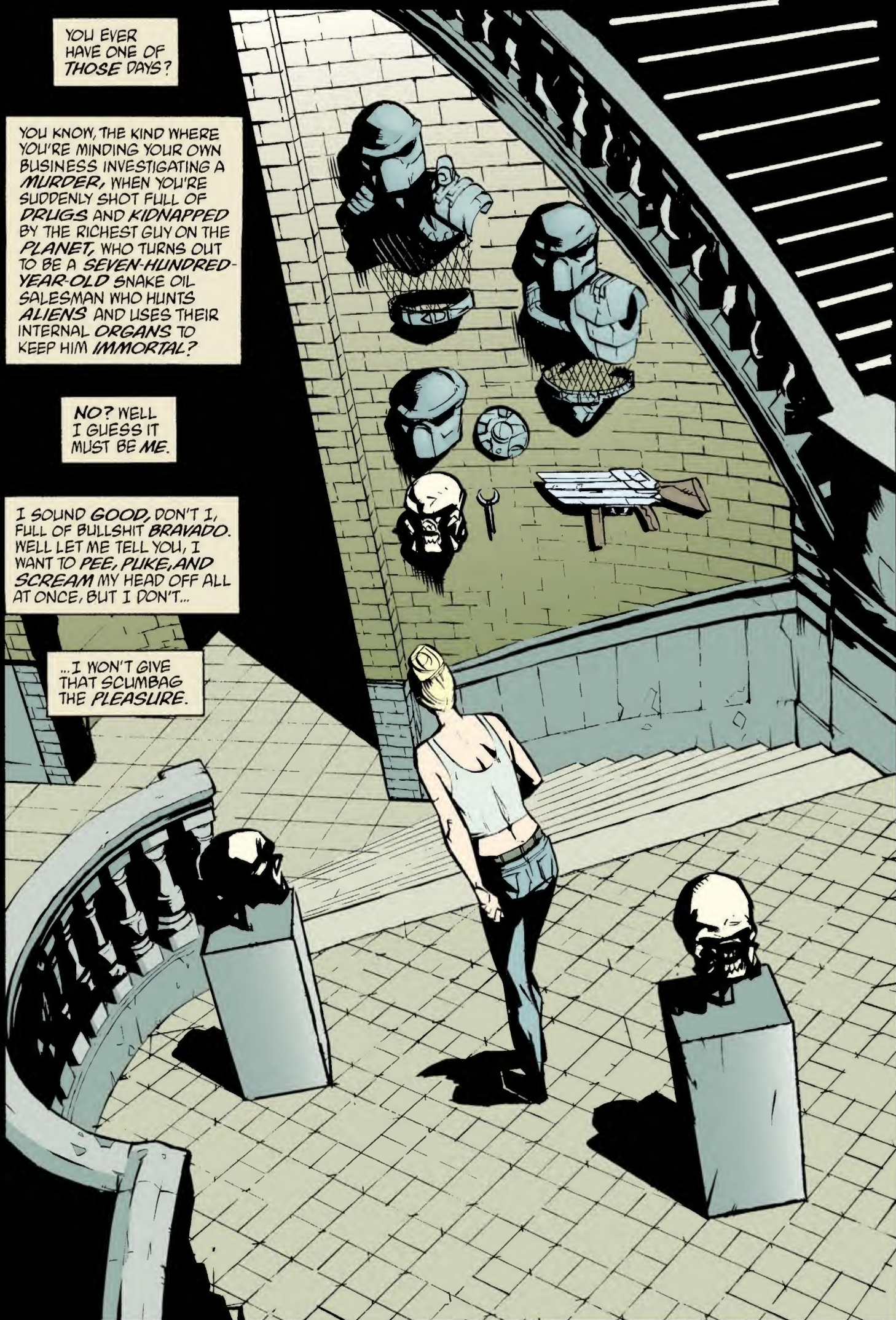
YOU EVER
HAVE ONE OF
THOSE DAYS?

YOU KNOW, THE KIND WHERE
YOU'RE MINDING YOUR OWN
BUSINESS INVESTIGATING A
MURDER, WHEN YOU'RE
SUDDENLY SHOT FULL OF
DRUGS AND *KIDNAPPED*
BY THE RICHEST GUY ON THE
PLANET, WHO TURNS OUT
TO BE A *SEVEN-HUNDRED-*
YEAR-OLD SNAKE OIL
SALESMAN WHO HUNTS
ALIENS AND USES THEIR
INTERNAL *ORGANS* TO
KEEP HIM *IMMORTAL*?

NO? WELL
I GUESS IT
MUST BE ME.

I SOUND *GOOD*, DON'T I,
FULL OF BULLSHIT *BRAVADO*.
WELL LET ME TELL YOU, I
WANT TO *PEE, PUKE, AND*
SCREAM MY HEAD OFF ALL
AT ONCE, BUT I DON'T...

...I WON'T GIVE
THAT SCUMBAG
THE PLEASURE.





LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT. YOU WANT *ME* TO WRITE YOUR BIOGRAPHY? *WHY?*



APPETITE, MISS MCBRIDE, FOR FAME, *NOTORIETY*, SIMPLE RECOGNITION OF WHO I *WAS* AND WHAT I HAVE *BECOME*.



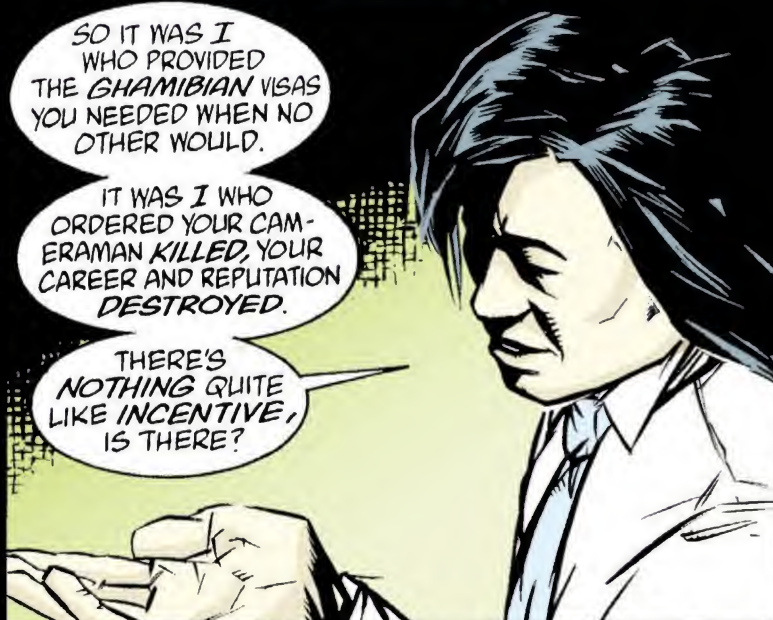
UNTIL RECENTLY, I THOUGHT I *GENUINELY* MIGHT DIE THIS TIME. THE *PREDATORS* WERE NOT TAKING MY *BAIT* SO READILY, *DEATH* WAS STALKING ME--

--I FELT THE URGE TO RECORD MY *EXTRAORDINARY* LIFE FOR POSTERITY, WITH *YOU* AS MY *SCRIBE*.



AGAIN, *WHY?*

I'VE FOLLOWED YOUR CAREER, YOU'RE AN APPEALING MAVERICK, BUT I NEEDED TO KNOW *HOW DETERMINED* YOU REALLY ARE.



SO IT WAS I WHO PROVIDED THE *GHAMIBIAN* VISAS YOU NEEDED WHEN NO OTHER WOULD.

IT WAS I WHO ORDERED YOUR CAM-ERAMAN *KILLED*, YOUR CAREER AND REPUTATION *DESTROYED*.

THERE'S *NOTHING* QUITE LIKE *INCENTIVE*, IS THERE?



YOU BASTARD!
YOU MURDERED
EARL AND SCREWED
UP MY LIFE ALL FOR
SOME BLOODY
TEST!!



OH, PLEASE!
I THREW DOWN
THE CHALLENGE, YOU
WEREN'T OBLIGED
TO TAKE IT UP.

I EVEN LEFT
CLUES. THE SPEAR
TIP? LAZARUS?



FORGET IT!
I'VE HAD ENOUGH. AT
LEAST I'VE *SOME*
MORALS LEFT.



REALLY?



GOD DAMN
YOU... WHAT
DO I DO?

WHAT WAS I
SUPPOSED TO
DO? HE HAD ME,
AND HE KNEW IT.

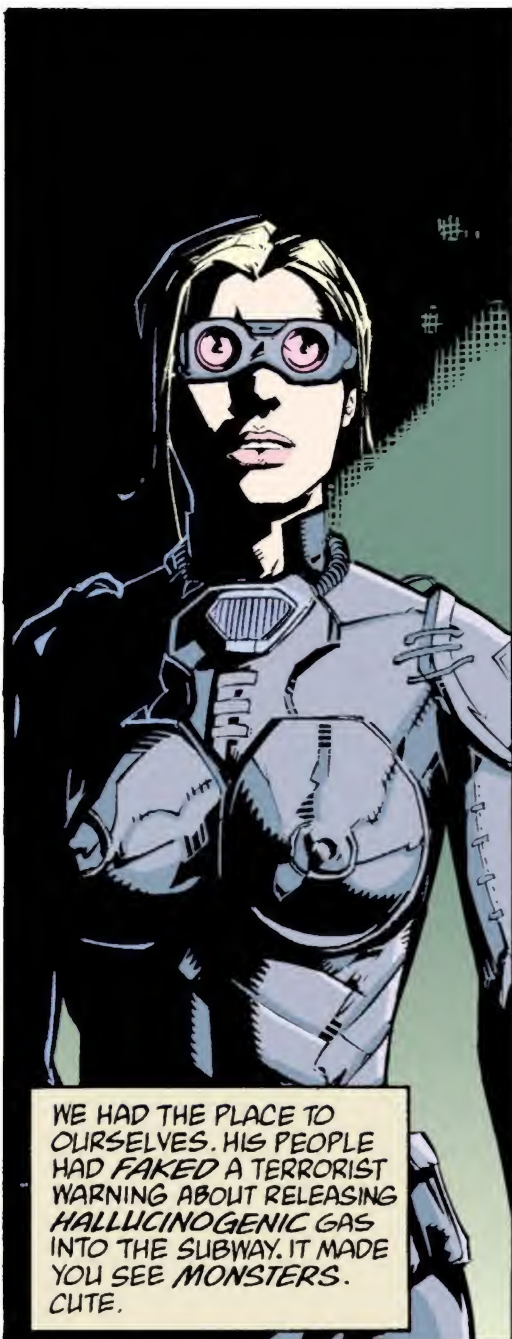
SIX HOURS
LATER WE WERE
UNDERGROUND.



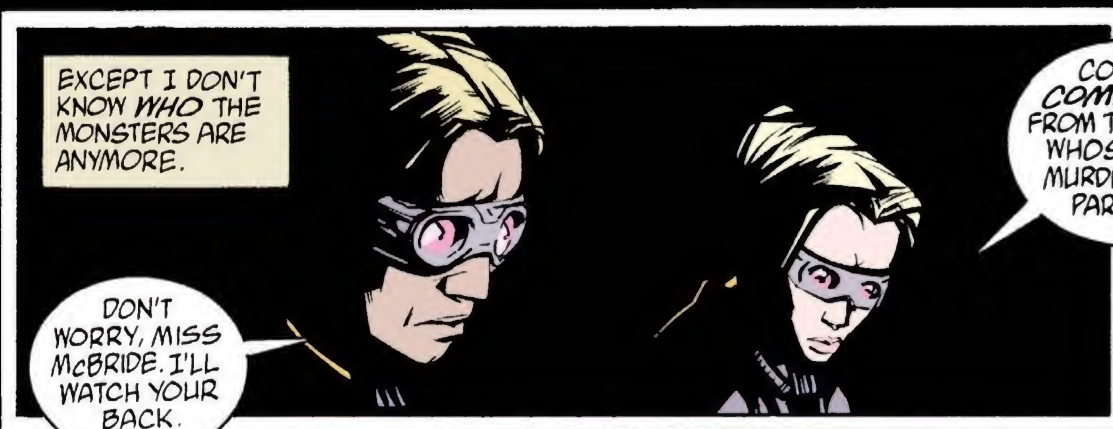
A SALARYMAN HAD BEEN
SNATCHED OFF A BULLET
TRAIN PLATFORM BY THE
REMAINING *CREATURE*
THAT HAD *ESCAPED*
FROM LEE'S LAB.

APPARENTLY THIS NECK OF
THE WOODS WAS ITS GAME
TRAIL. *THE PREDATORS*
HAD SLAUGHTERED ONE AND
SEEMED INTENT ON HUNTING
THE OTHER. SO WAS *LEE*.

HE WANTED TO
CAPTURE ONE
ALIVE AND USE
IT AS *BAIT*.




WE HAD THE PLACE TO
OURSELVES. HIS PEOPLE
HAD *FAKED* A TERRORIST
WARNING ABOUT RELEASING
HALLUCINOGENIC GAS
INTO THE SUBWAY. IT MADE
YOU SEE *MONSTERS*.
CUTE.




EXCEPT I DON'T
KNOW *WHO* THE
MONSTERS ARE
ANYMORE.

DON'T
WORRY, MISS
MCBRIDE. I'LL
WATCH YOUR
BACK.

COLD
COMFORT
FROM THE MAN
WHOSE MEN
MURDERED MY
PARTNER.



YOU *KNEW*
THE RISKS CROSSING
INTO GHAMIBIA, YET YOU
STILL PUT *HIS* LIFE ON
THE LINE TO GET
YOUR FACE ON
CAMERA.



I'M A
PAID KILLER,
IT'S WHAT I DO, I
ACCEPT THAT. YOU
GAMBLERD WITH HIS
LIFE BUT DON'T ACCEPT
RESPONSIBILITY
FOR IT.

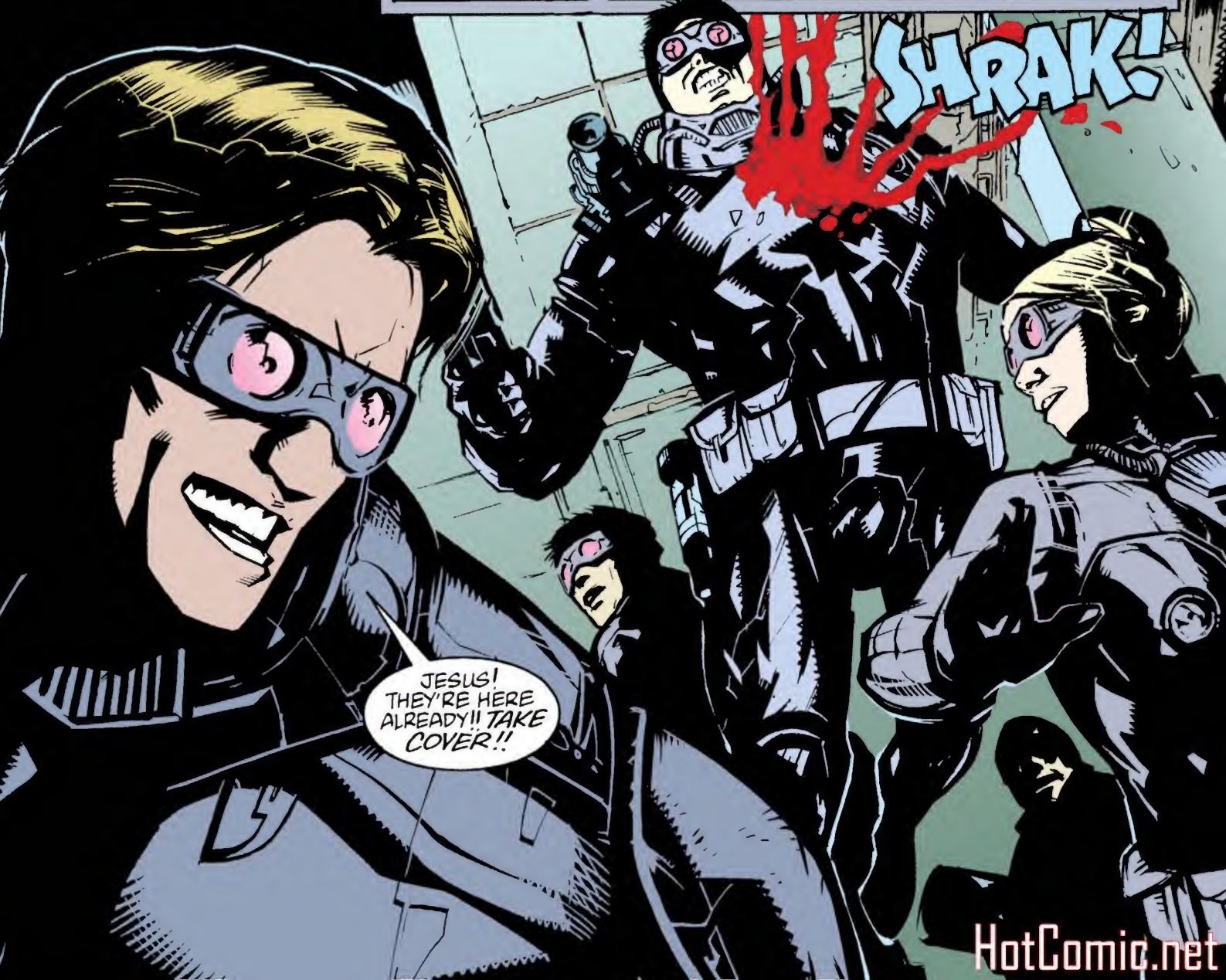
DON'T
GET DEEP,
IT'S NOT
YOU.



QUIET!
WE'RE HERE.



THE PLATFORM'S UP
AHEAD. THERE'S *SOME-*
THING THERE. CABOT,
TAKE POINT.

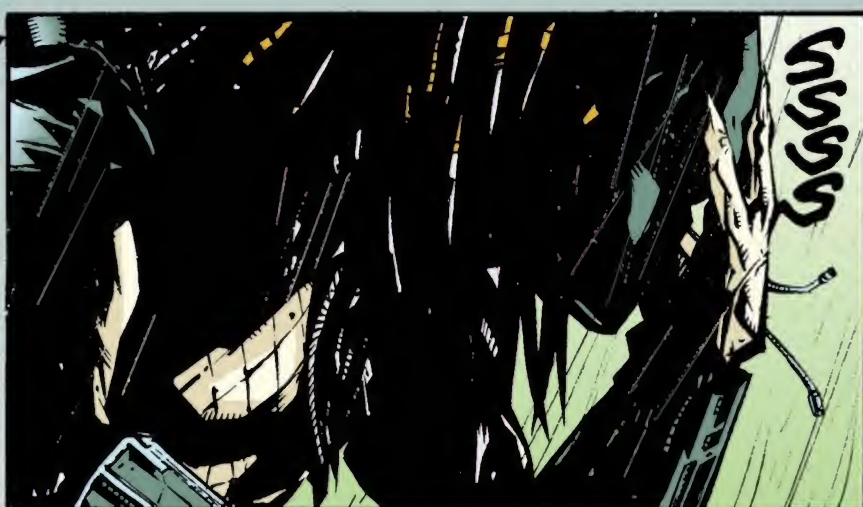


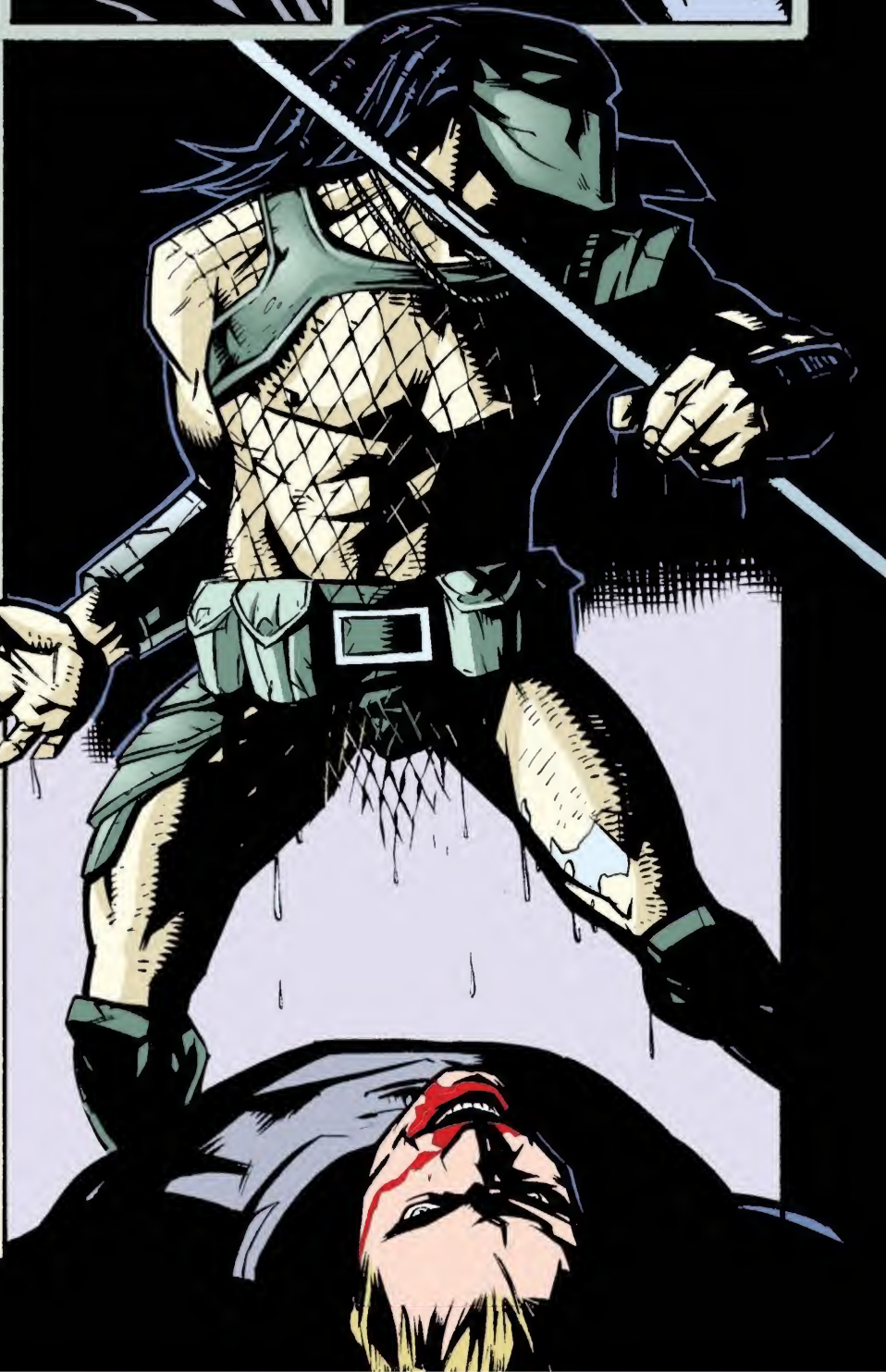














PLIK
PLIK
PLIK



PLIK
PLIK

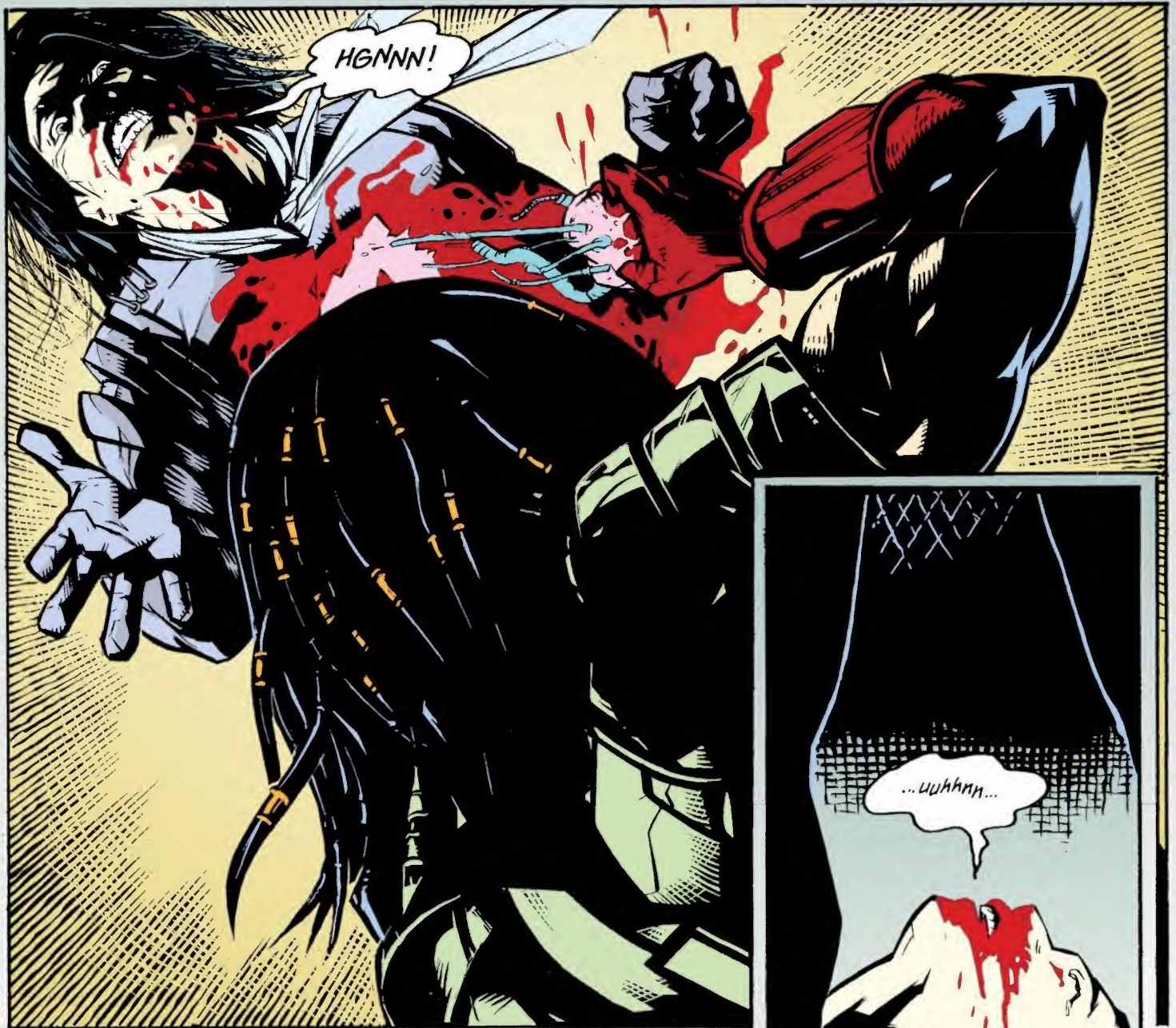


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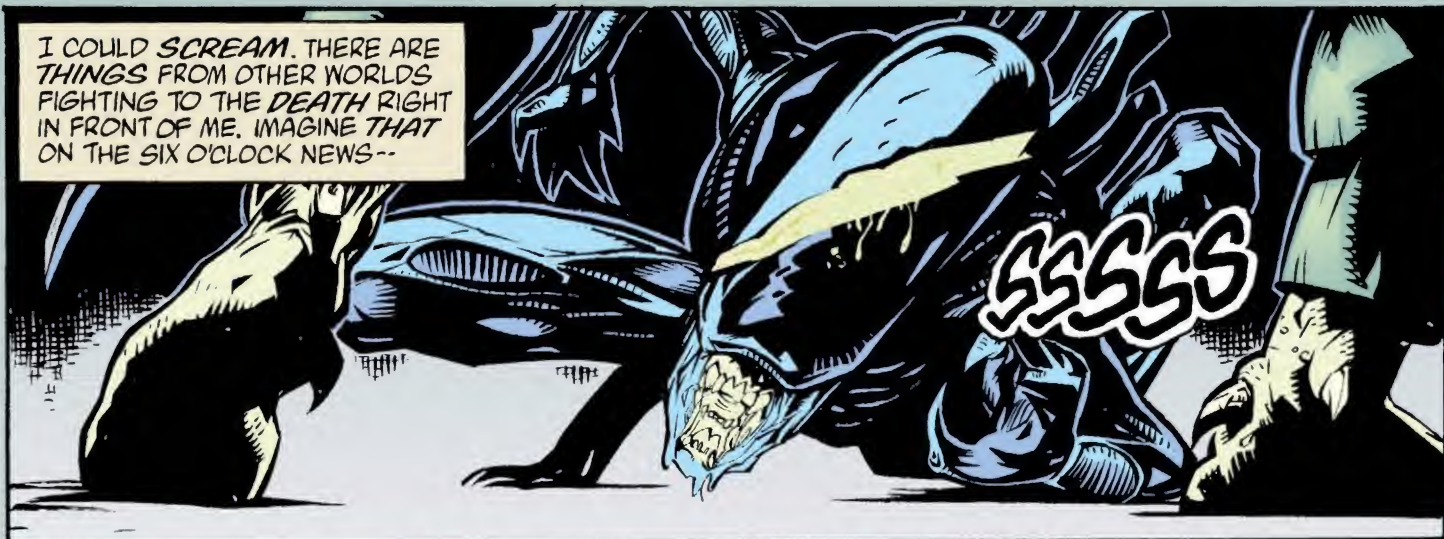


SKREEEE





I COULD SCREAM. THERE ARE THINGS FROM OTHER WORLDS FIGHTING TO THE DEATH RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME. IMAGINE THAT ON THE SIX O'CLOCK NEWS--



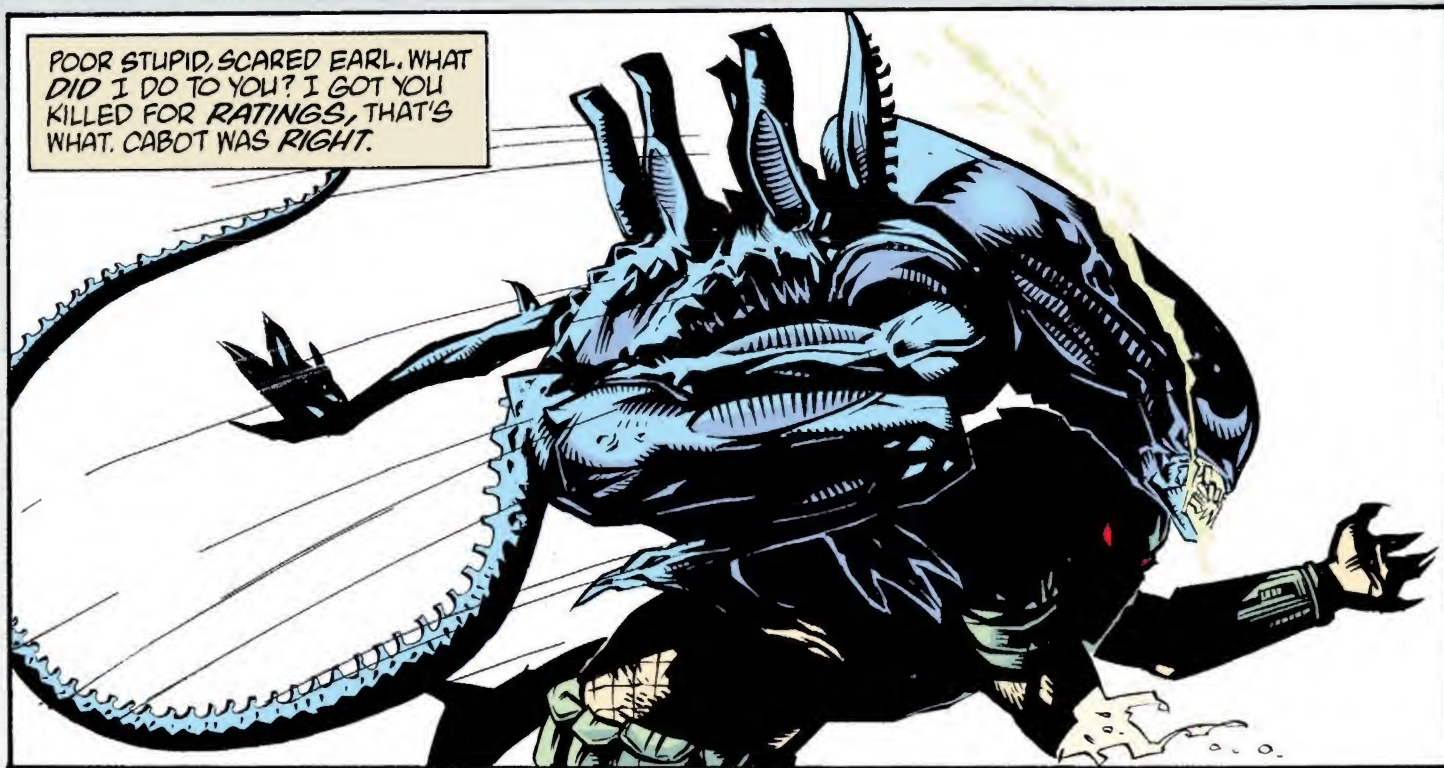
--I JUST WISH I HAD A CAMERA.



THEN IT HITS ME... EARL.



POOR STUPID, SCARED EARL. WHAT DID I DO TO YOU? I GOT YOU KILLED FOR RATINGS, THAT'S WHAT. CABOT WAS RIGHT.

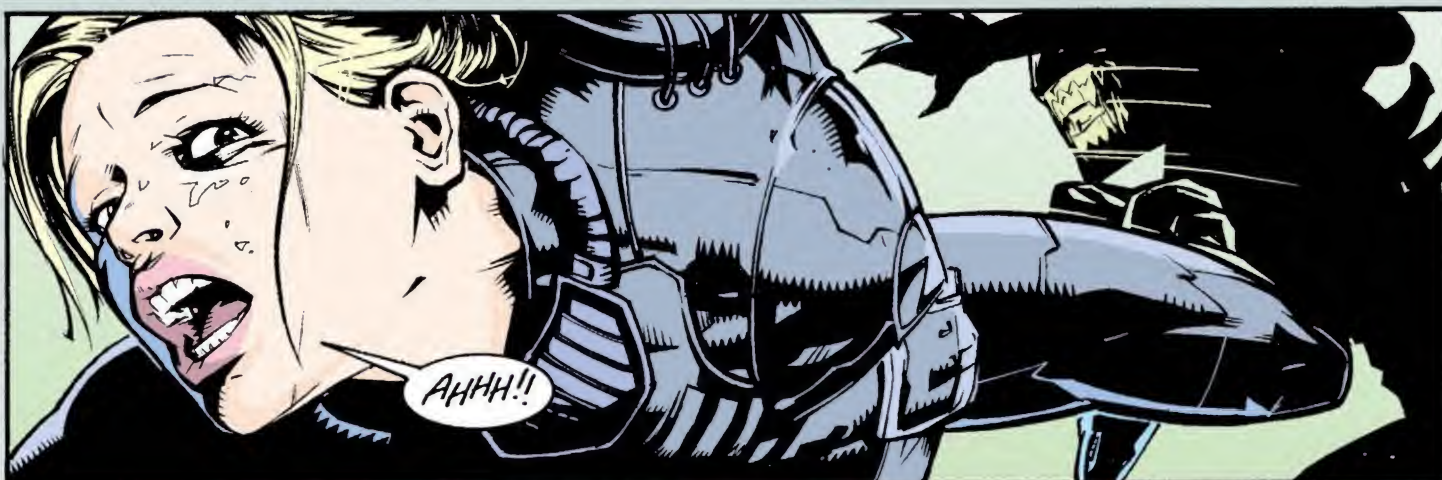




WHAT A BITCH.



SO, I GUESS THIS IS MY PAYBACK.



AHHH!!



NO, NOT LIKE THIS!



CABOT'S GUN!



DO IT...



...DO IT NOW!!



DIE!!

BOOM!!





I CAME TO IN A HOSPITAL A WEEK LATER. SEEMS SOMEONE OR SOMETHING HAD CARRIED ME UP TO STREET LEVEL BEFORE I BLEED TO DEATH.

銀座駅
Ginza sta.

"AN AGENT FROM UNIT K VISITED ME EACH DAY, GENTLY PRESSURING ME FOR DETAILS. FAT CHANCE.

AS I'D EXPECTED, LEE'S PERSONAL AND PRIVATE ASSETS HAD BEEN SEIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT. THEY DENIED THE EXISTENCE OF HIS PREDATOR ARCHIVE AND THE SPACE-CRAFT.

I RETURNED TO LONDON A MILLIONAIRE, LEE'S POST-HUMOUS PAYMENT FOR HIS BIOGRAPHY. I GAVE EARL'S FOLKS HALF.

LEE MAY HAVE BEEN A MADMAN, BUT AT LEAST HE WAS A RICH MADMAN.

NOW I'M USING MY WINDFALL TO DIG FOR THE TRUTH, AND I'VE HIRED CRAB AND HIS TECHNO-PAGAN CHUMS TO HELP ME.



THERE ARE MONSTERS OUT THERE IN THE DARK CORNERS OF THE WORLD. THINGS THAT HUNT MEN FOR SPORT.

WHO ARE THEY? WHERE DO THEY COME FROM? WHAT DO THEY REALLY WANT?

IT'S THE STORY OF A LIFETIME, OF MANY LIFETIMES, AND ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, IT'S MINE FOR THE TELLING.

reisen
ich glaube



OLD SECRETS



script and art
ALEX MALEEV

colors
STAISSI BRANDT

lettering
CLEM ROBINS



OLD SECRETS

BRODILOVO,
BULGARIA,
SOMEDAY SOON...

IT'S BEEN ALMOST
SIX YEARS SINCE
ELENA LEFT THE
VILLAGE TO WORK
FOR THE B.A.N.*

...ANOTHER DEVOTED
PARISHIONER WHO HAD
LEFT THE FLOCK...

...UNTIL SOME-
THING BROUGHT
HER BACK TO ME.

*BULGARIAN
ACADEMY OF
SCIENCE
--editor

EVER SEE
ANYTHING
LIKE THIS,
DOCTOR?

NEVER.

WHERE
DID YOU
FIND THE
SUBJECT?

"ON THE HILL, APPROXIMATELY
THIRTY METERS FROM THE
OLD CHURCH."

THAT CHEST CAVITY...
SOMETHING COMPROMISED
THE BODY FROM
THE INSIDE!

"AND THE SKIN...
REMARKABLY
WELL PRESERVED."

I THINK IT'S TIME I PAID
A FRIEND A VISIT.

DOBRE.

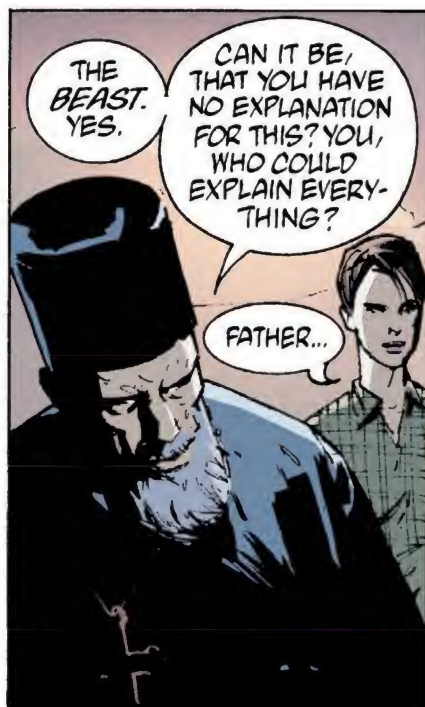
ELENA.
IT IS GOOD
TO SEE
YOU AGAIN,
MY CHILD.

MAY GOD
PROTECT
YOU FROM THE
DISTURBING
REVELATION
THAT HAS BROUGHT
YOU BACK
HOME.

IS THIS
WHERE THEY
FOUND THE
SUBJECT?

"ASIDE FROM
THE CRITICAL
WOUND, THERE'S
HARDLY ANY
DECOMPOSITION."

HE'S
NOT GOING
ANYWHERE.



THE
BEAST.
YES.

CAN IT BE,
THAT YOU HAVE
NO EXPLANATION
FOR THIS? YOU,
WHO COULD
EXPLAIN EVERY-
THING?

FATHER...



FOLLOW ME.

I THINK
THAT FOR
ONCE I CAN
OFFER YOU
ANSWERS.



WHAT I
AM ABOUT TO
SHOW YOU IS AS
OLD AS THIS
CHURCH...



...THE CHURCH
OF SAINT GEORGE.
IT IS NEARLY SEVEN
HUNDRED YEARS OLD,
ACCORDING TO AN
ARCHAEOLOGIST FROM
THE ACADEMY WHO
VISITED THE VILLAGE
NOT LONG AGO.

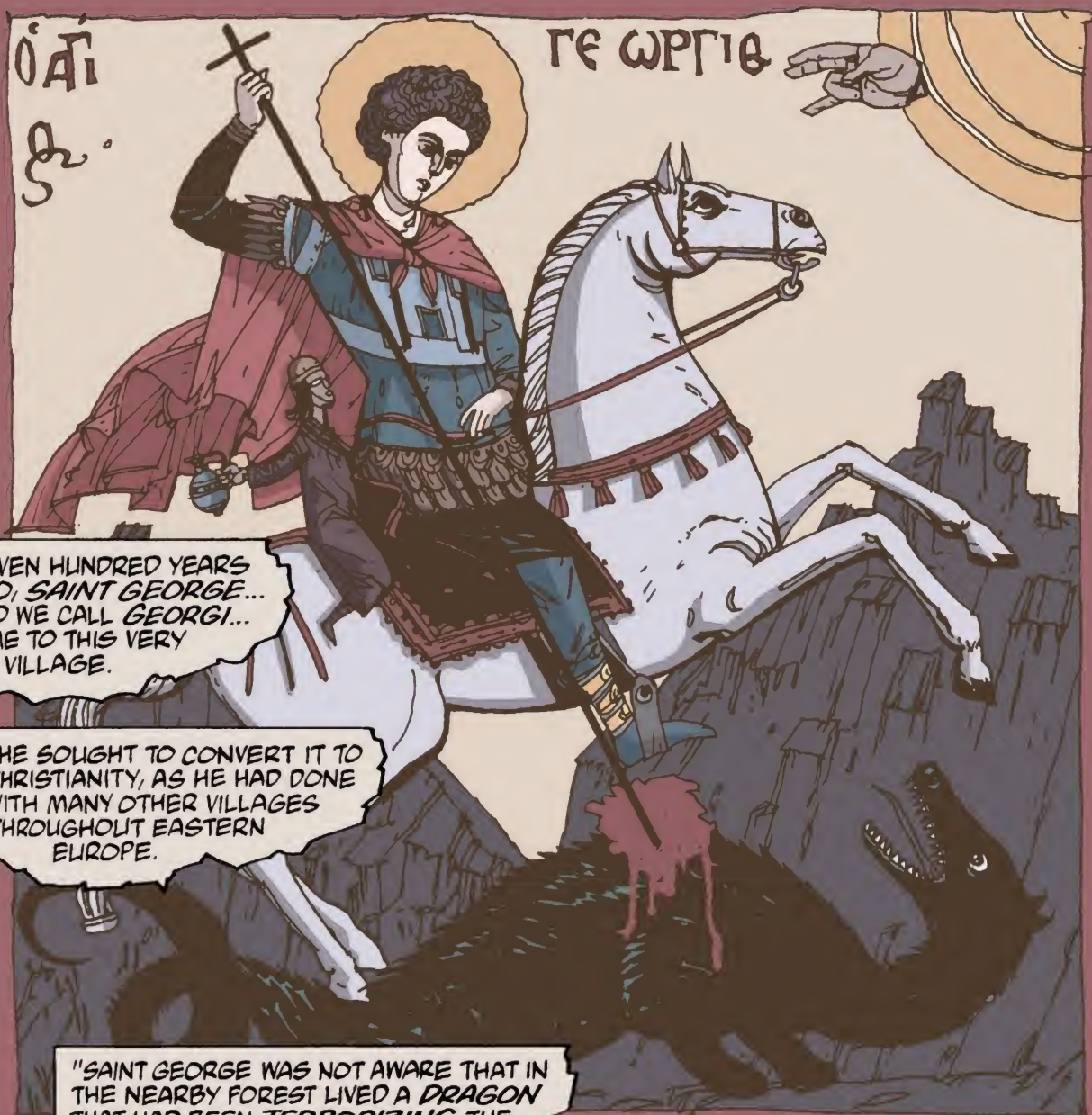
I COULD
OPEN THIS BOOK
AND TELL HIM *EXACTLY*
WHEN IT WAS BUILT AND
WHY IT IS HERE, ON THIS
LITTLE HILL IN THE MIDDLE
OF THIS POOR AND
FORGOTTEN
LAND.

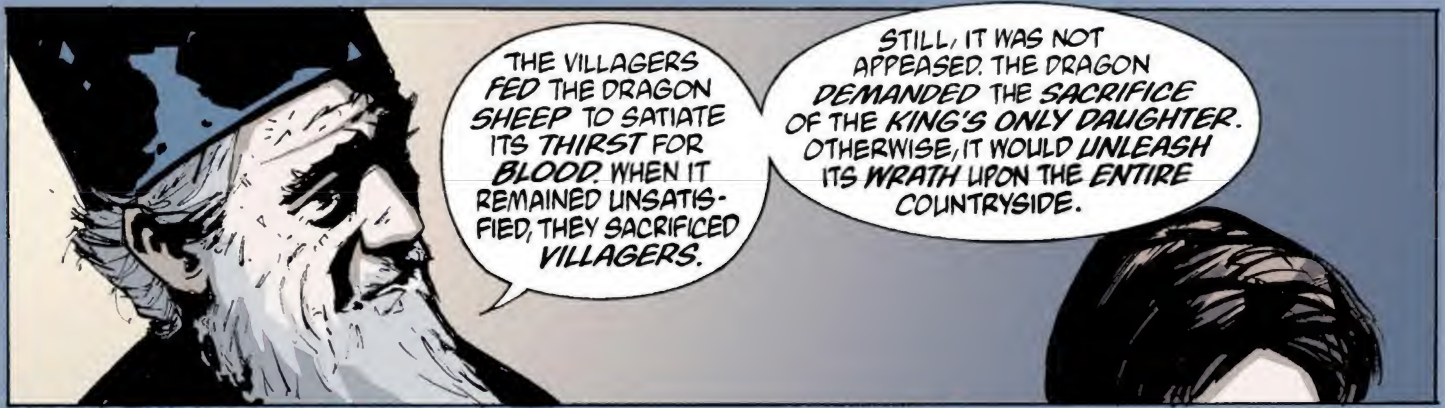
FATHER,
PLEASE, WITH ALL
DUE RESPECT, I'M
HERE AS A SCIENTIST,
NOT AS --

OF
COURSE.



"IN A STORY..."





THE VILLAGERS
FED THE DRAGON
SHEEP TO SATIATE
ITS THIRST FOR
BLOOD. WHEN IT
REMAINED UNSATIS-
FIED, THEY SACRIFICED
VILLAGERS.

STILL, IT WAS NOT
APPEASED. THE DRAGON
DEMANDED THE SACRIFICE
OF THE KING'S ONLY DAUGHTER.
OTHERWISE, IT WOULD UNLEASH
ITS WRATH UPON THE ENTIRE
COUNTRYSIDE.



"AS SAINT GEORGE WAS TOLD
THIS TRAGIC TALE, HE WITNESSED
A BALL OF FIRE ERUPTING
FROM THE SKY.



"THE DRAGON REVEALED ITSELF
FROM ITS SHROUD OF FLAMES,
COME TO TAKE THE GIRL AS
A SACRIFICE.

"INSTEAD THE BEAST
FOUND SAINT GEORGE.



"THE BATTLE
RAGED, UNTIL
SAINT GEORGE
DROVE HIS
LANCE--

"--DEEP INTO
THE BEAST'S
CHEST.

"THE DRAGON WAS
DEFEATED, THE
VILLAGE SAVED."



AND ON THE SITE OF
THIS VICTORY THE CHURCH
WAS ERECTED, AND GIVEN
THE NAME OF THE VILLAGE'S
PROTECTOR.



THAT'S A GREAT
STORY, METODI.
IT'S BEEN A
LONG TIME
SINCE I'VE
HEARD IT.



"AND I'M SURE THAT THERE
IS A LEVEL OF TRUTH WOVEN
INTO EVERY LEGEND."



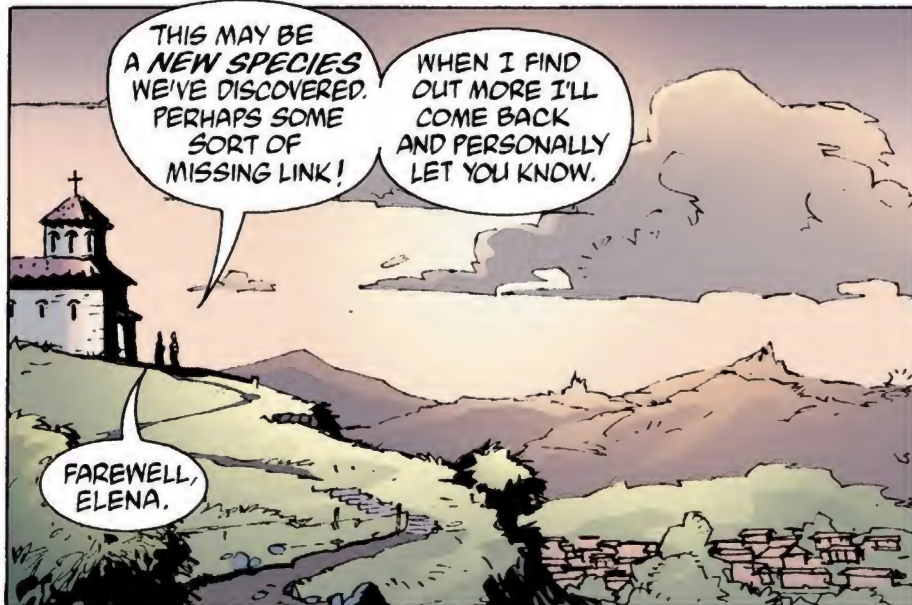
BUT IN THIS DAY
AND AGE, I FIND IT
HARD TO BELIEVE
THAT *ANYONE*
WOULD SEEK TO
EXPLAIN AWAY
THIS *SINGULAR*
DISCOVERY...

"...WITH A
FAIRY
TALE."



THERE *IS* EVIL IN THE WORLD, FATHER,
BUT IT'S NOT DRAGONS AND DEMONS.
IT'S DISEASE, AND GREED, AND THE
KNOWING DESTRUCTION
OF OUR PLANET.

NOT WHAT
WE'VE PULLED
FROM THE
GROUND.



THIS MAY BE
A *NEW SPECIES*
WE'VE DISCOVERED.
PERHAPS SOME
SORT OF
MISSING LINK!

WHEN I FIND
OUT MORE I'LL
COME BACK
AND PERSONALLY
LET YOU KNOW.

FAREWELL,
ELENA.



FOR SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS
A *BROTHERHOOD* HAS
EXISTED. ITS PURPOSE...

...TO KEEP A *SECRET*.

A *SECRET* THAT
MANKIND WAS NOT
PREPARED TO DEAL
WITH CENTURIES AGO...



...AND *STILL* IS NOT.

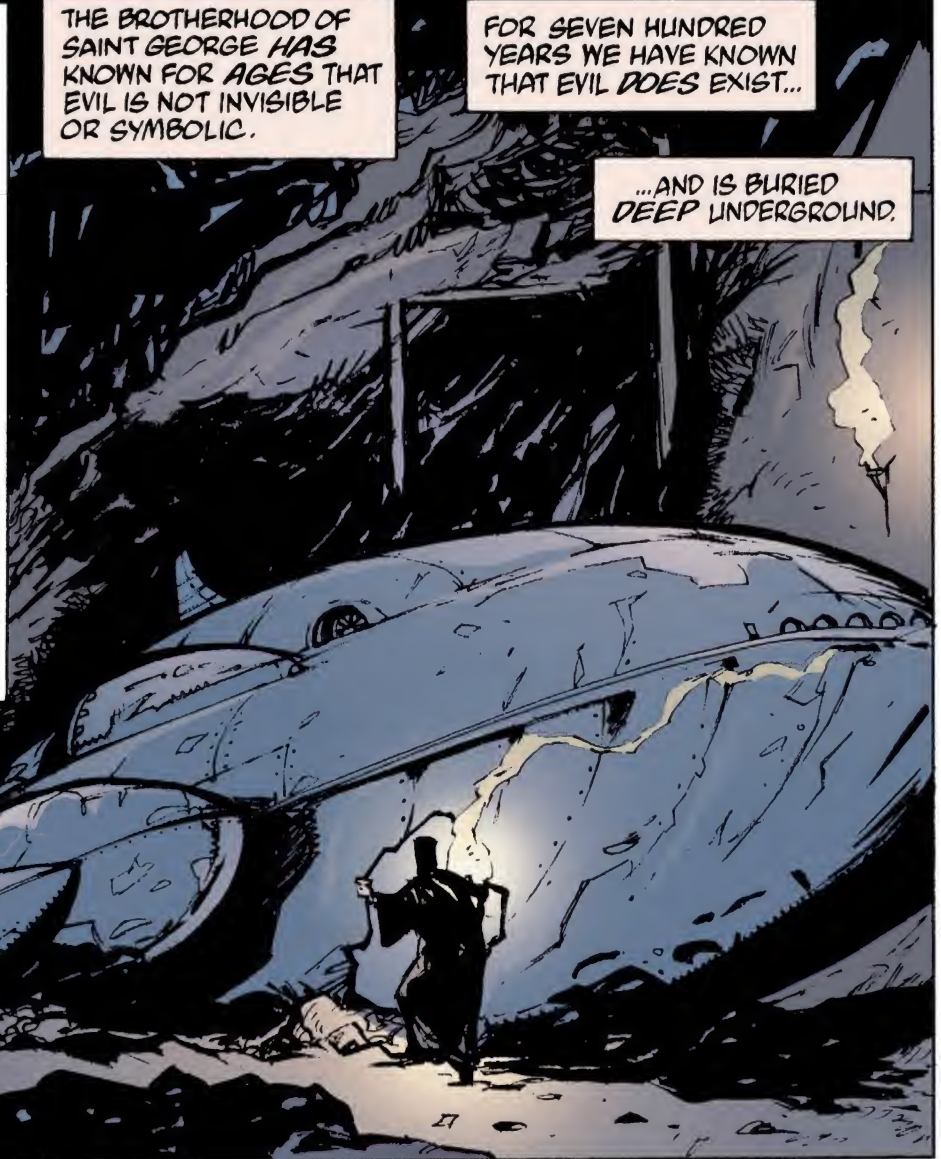




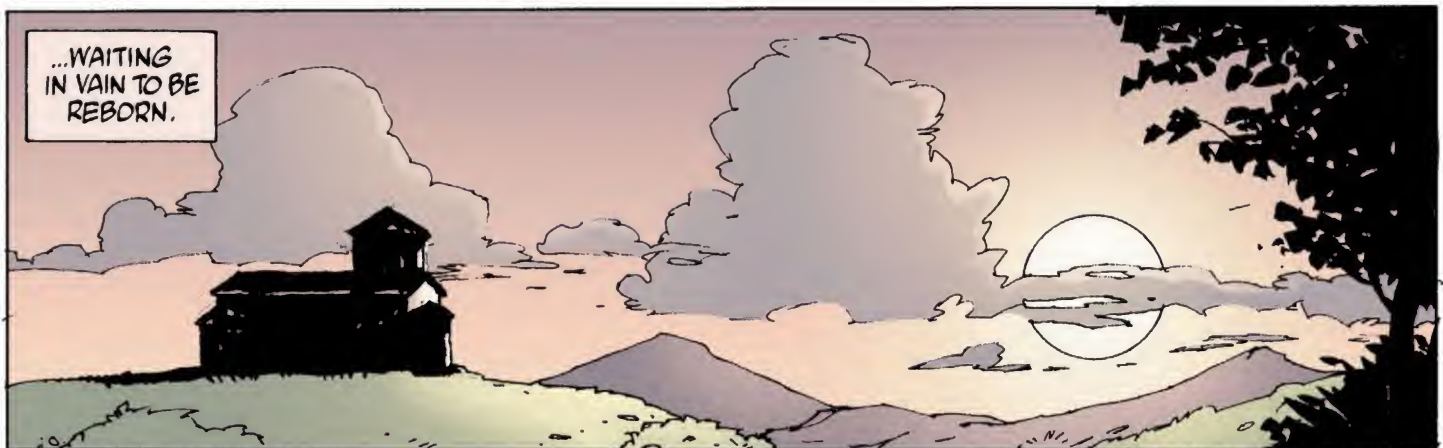
THE BROTHERHOOD OF SAINT GEORGE HAS KNOWN FOR AGES THAT EVIL IS NOT INVISIBLE OR SYMBOLIC.

FOR SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS WE HAVE KNOWN THAT EVIL DOES EXIST...

...AND IS BURIED DEEP UNDERGROUND.



IT IS AN EVIL THAT LIES SLEEPING...



...WAITING IN VAIN TO BE REBORN.

THE WEB

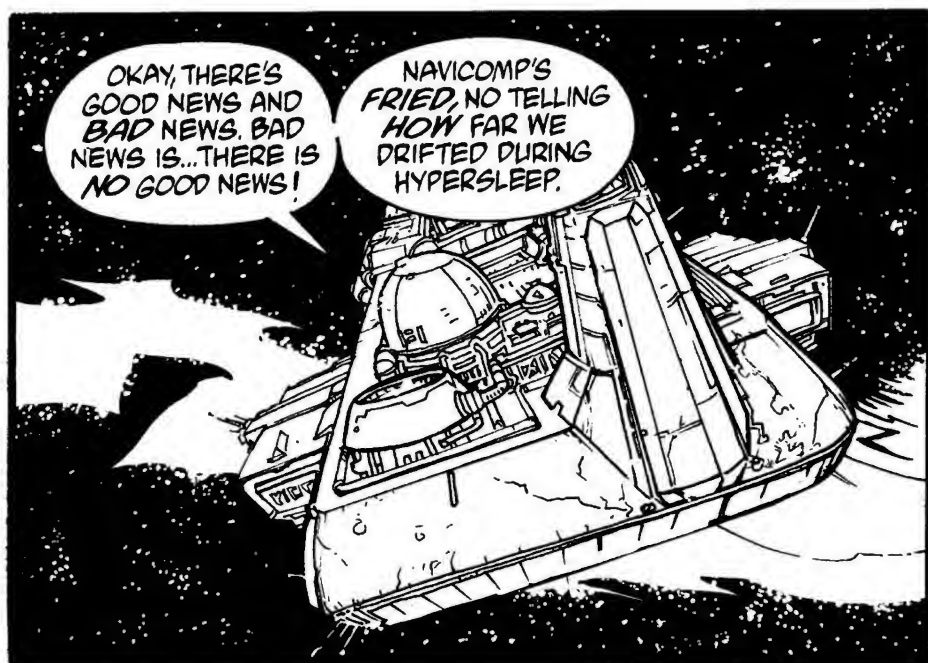


script
IAN EDGINTON

art
DEREK THOMPSON
BRIAN O'CONNELL

lettering
CLEM ROBINS





OKAY, THERE'S
GOOD NEWS AND
BAD NEWS. BAD
NEWS IS...THERE IS
NO GOOD NEWS!

NAVICOMP'S
FRIED, NO TELLING
HOW FAR WE
DRIFTED DURING
HYPERSLLEEP.



EXTERIOR
SENSOR'S SHOT, TOO.
I'M DETECTING SENSOR
GHOSTS ALL OVER.



OUR
NEAREST
NAVIGATION
MARKER
?

UNKNOWN.
WE'RE WAY
OFF THE
COMMERCIAL
LANES.

I WARNED
YOU THIS CRAP'D
HAPPEN!

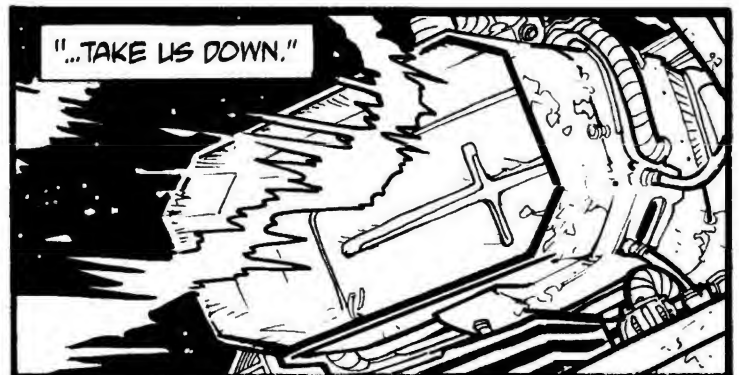


WHERE EXACTLY
DOES OUR PERCENTAGE
FOR SHIP MAINTENANCE
GO, CAPTAIN? YOUR
BACK POCKET?



WATCH
YOUR MOUTH,
ICART!

OR YOU'LL
DO WHAT?





SIGNAL'S STRONG. THIRTY CLICKS, DUE EAST.

MISTER PENZER...

SADDLE UP, LET'S MOVE.

SONOVA...

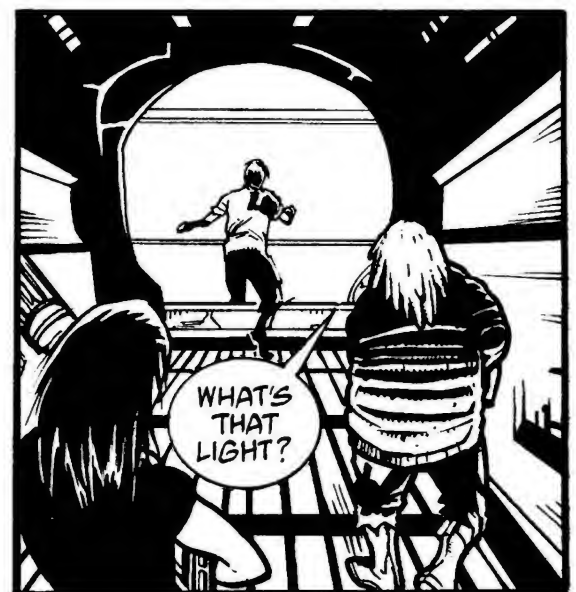
...AN ORBITAL FACTORY, BEEN HERE YEARS, TO LOOK AT IT.

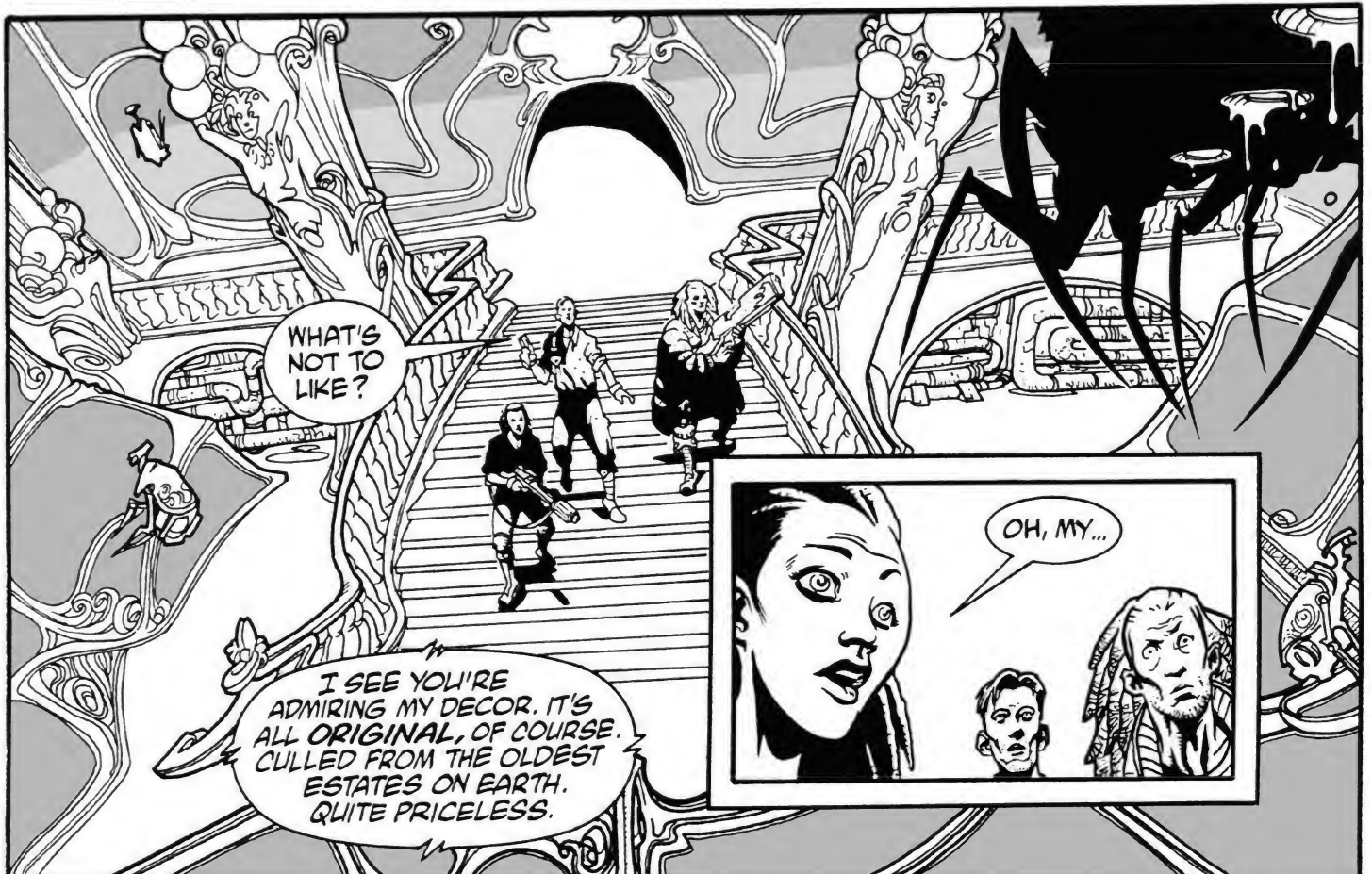
AND IT'S ALL OURS. SALVAGE SCRAP ALONE'S WORTH A FORTUNE.

HOLD UP, I'M READING SOMETHING, MULTIPLE TRACES...

THEY'RE ALL OVER. CAN'T GET A FIX...









BUT THEN, I DO
LIKE TO SURROUND MYSELF
WITH BEAUTIFUL THINGS.

HOW DO YOU
DO. I AM ROBERT
SHELDON. WELCOME
TO MY HOME.

SHELDON...THE
ROBERT SHELDON? THE
MULTI-BILLIONAIRE
INDUSTRIALIST?

AH, I
SENSE YOUR
INCREDULITY...



...IS *THIS* BETTER?
MY HOLOGRAPHIC *PUBLIC*
FACE. ONE THAT DOESN'T
MAKE THE INVESTORS
VOMIT.

I HAVE
EXISTED HERE
FOR CLOSE TO
THIRTY YEARS,
WORKING.

WORKING?



MY *REVENGE*,
FOR THE FUTURE THEY
DENIED ME.



"I WAS BORN ON RYUSHI, A CHIGUSA
CORP COLONY. MY PARENTS WANTED A
FRESH START, CLEAN AIR, OPEN SPACES...

"...A NEW LIFE.



"IT WAS THE
DEATH OF THEM.

"UNKNOWN TO US, RYUSHI WAS A
HUNTER'S WORLD. SEEDED WITH XENO-
MORPHS BY VOCIFEROUS PREDATORS."



ONLY A
HANDFUL OF US
ESCAPED. I DEDICATED
MYSELF TO *ERADICAT-
ING* MY PARENTS'
KILLERS.

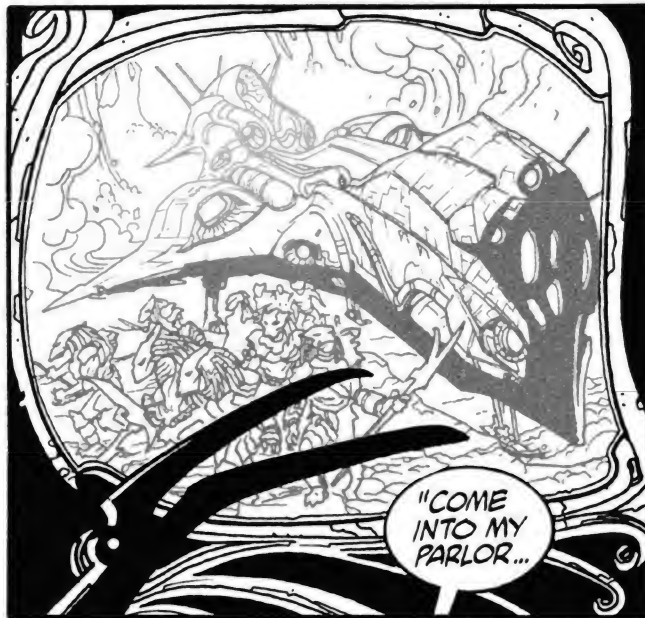
MY *INTELLECT*
WAS MY WEAPON. THE
CORNERSTONE OF MY
FINANCIAL EMPIRE.

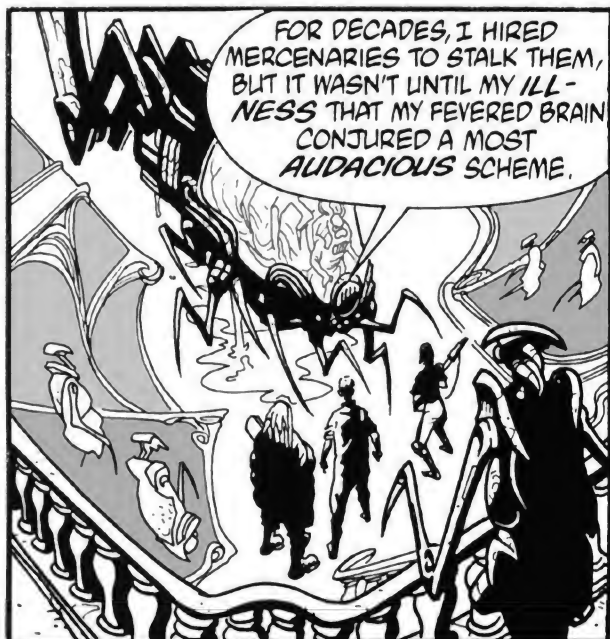


THE JAPANESE
HAVE A SAYING:
"*BUSINESS*
IS WAR."

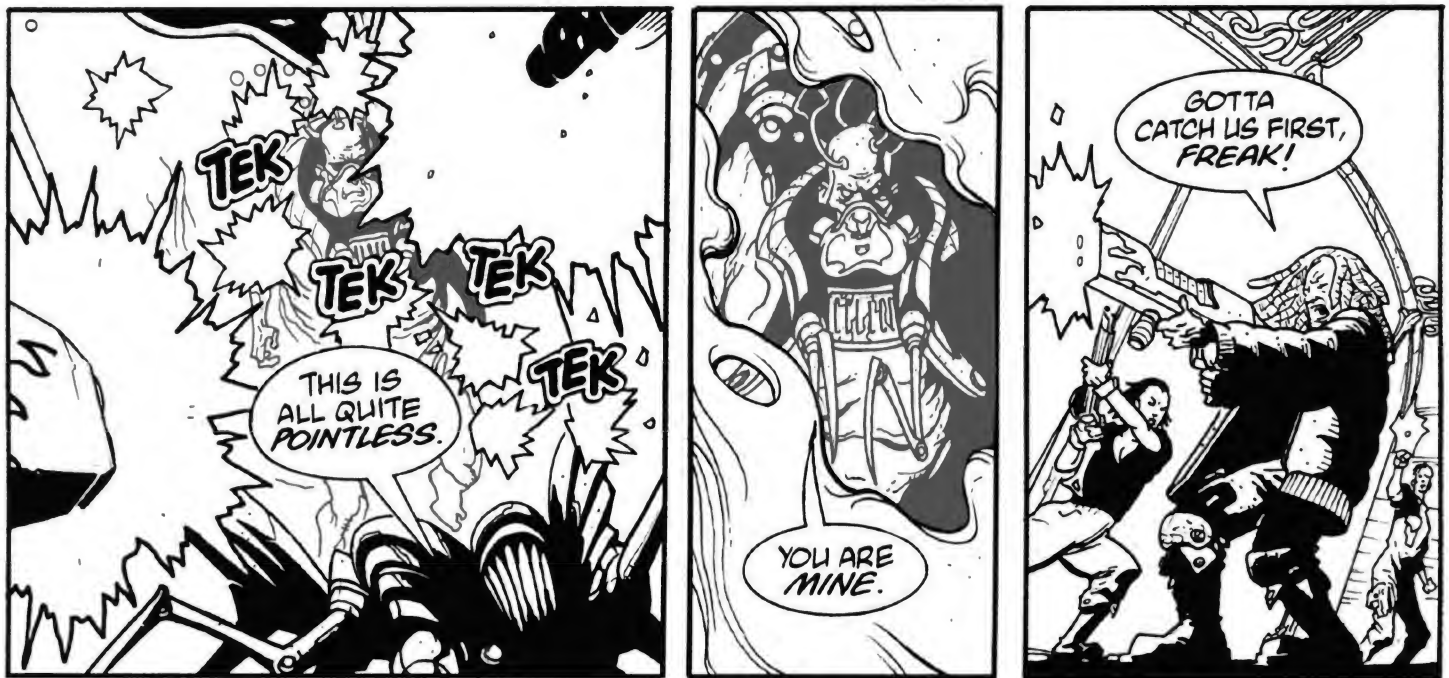


AND I MEANT
BUSINESS.



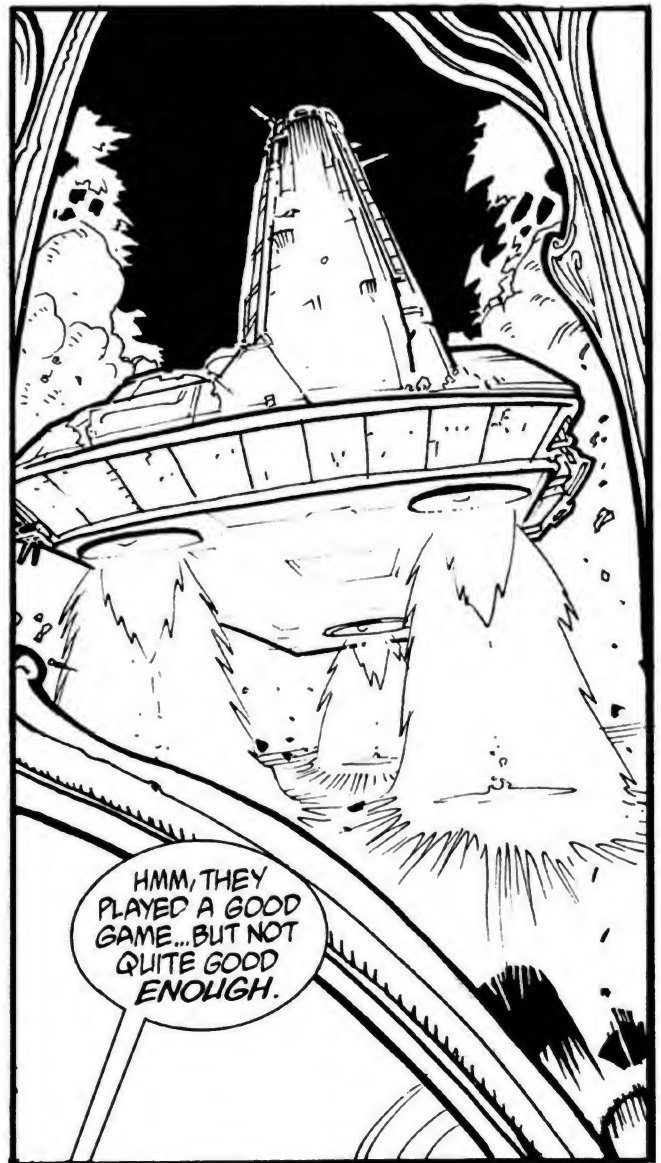
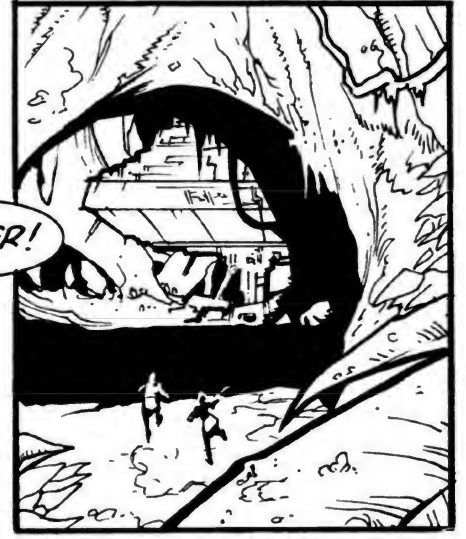








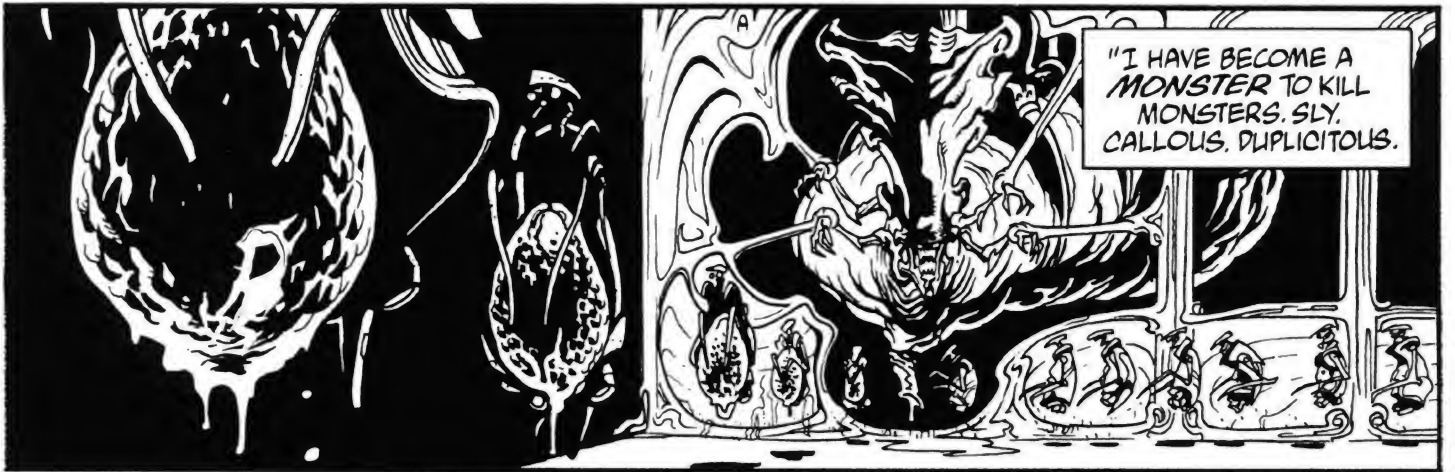








"TO KILL THE BEAST, YOU MUST
KNOW HIM. TO KNOW HIM, YOU
MUST *BECOME* HIM.



"I HAVE BECOME A
MONSTER TO KILL
MONSTERS. SLY,
CALLOUS, DUPLICITOUS.



"I THOUGHT IT WAS FOR
REVENGE. I WAS *WRONG*.



"IT WAS FOR *PLEASURE*.

"I AM *HOME*. A
PREDATOR AMONGST
PREDATORS."

END

ALIENSTM VS. PREDATORTM OMNIBUS VOLUME 1

Mankind's two ultimate nightmares come together in mortal combat, and whoever wins—we lose. On the remote planet Ryushi, a small ranching community becomes an unwilling participant in a deadly ritual: extraterrestrial Predators have seeded Ryushi with Alien eggs in order to create the ultimate hunt. But what the Predators don't know is that an Alien queen egg is amongst those they've sent as potential hunting stock, and when the Predators arrive, the hunters become the hunted amidst a monumental swarm of Aliens, and they may need to turn to the very same humans they regard as little more than potential trophies to give them any hope of survival.

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